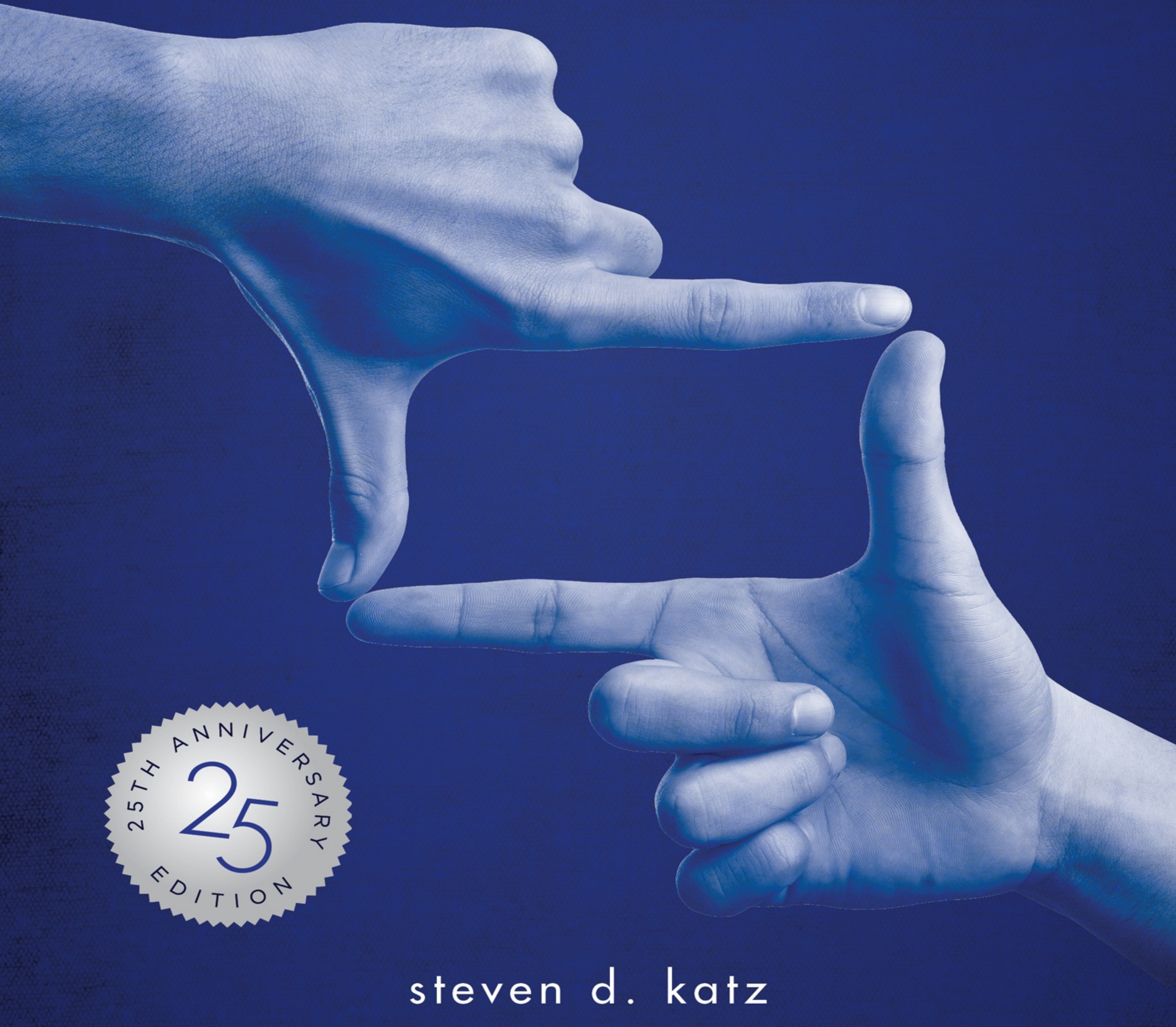
film directing shot by shot

visualizing from concept to screen



25TH ANNIVERSARY
25
EDITION

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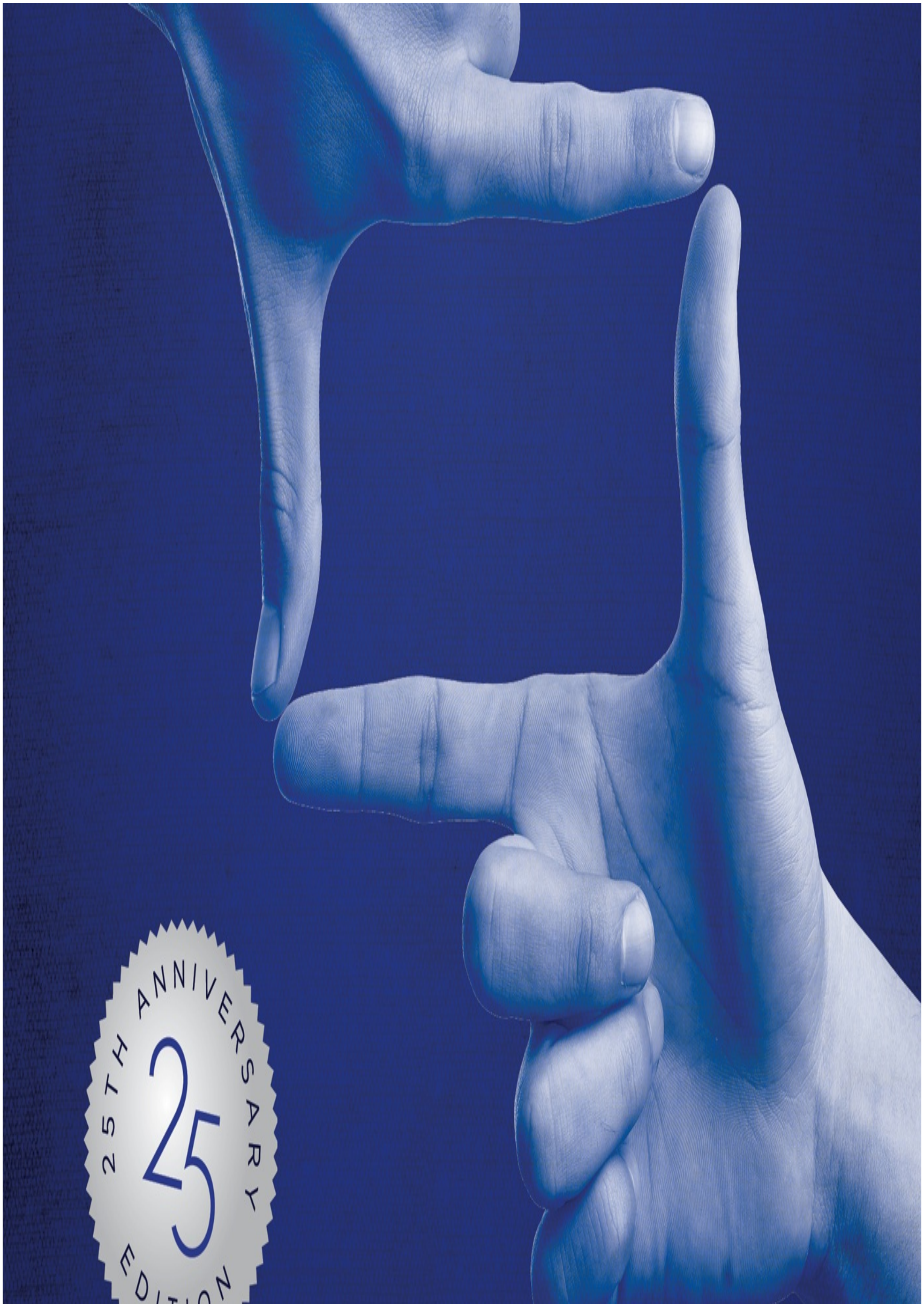
25TH ANNIVERSARY
25
EDITION

steven d. katz

Praise for the 25th Anniversary Edition of *Shot by Shot* by Steven D. Katz!

"Thank you, Steven. An inspirational book in a time of need. An almost Biblical compendium of filmmaking techniques, best practices, and skills that any filmmaker needs to know and that some filmmakers would rather be kept secret."

John Badham, Professor of Film & Digital Arts, Chapman University; director, *Saturday Night Fever, WarGames, Short Circuit*

"I daily use the tools I learned from *Shot by Shot*. An amazingly clear, specific, and on-point book on how to translate your thoughts into shootable images. And the new edition is richer in every aspect. A must-read for every visual storyteller."

Simone Bartesaghi, award-winning filmmaker; author, *The Director's Six Senses*

"*Shot by Shot* is the bible. There's no better book in existence on using images to tell a story."

Gil Bettman, professor, Chapman University; author, *First Time Director, Directing the Camera*

"Though the technology and tools change, the core lessons found in *Shot by Shot* are as applicable today as they were when the book was first published. Focusing on how to creatively visualize the complete evolution of a film from concept through execution, *Shot by Shot* is a wonderful tool and guide for writers, directors, and cinema aficionados alike. A book that will be as relevant in its 50th anniversary edition as it is now."

Stefan Blitz, editor-in-chief, forcesofgeek.com

"*Shot by Shot* is the best book for learning film grammar and visual storytelling."

Becky Bristow, director, *The Wild Thornberries*; Chair of Character Animation Program, CalArts

"Technology changes. Media changes. But the basic craft of visual storytelling remains the same. No matter your media, if you are creating visual stories, you need *Shot by Shot*."

John A. Davis, creator, writer, director, *Jimmy Neutron: Boy Genius*

"A must-have. *Shot by Shot* is filled with valuable, solid technical information that can only otherwise be learned by years of trial and error working on film sets. Directing is about visualizing the movie that you want to make and knowing how to physically do it. It’s about teamwork. This updated classic shines a light on creating an amazing film.”

Forris Day Jr., “Rolling Tape” filmmaking video podcast, host

“This is *the* book for filmmakers and screenwriters. *Shot by Shot* is a must-read and a must-have in your library, whether you are a new filmmaker, a seasoned filmmaker with distribution, a producer, editor, or even a screenwriter. And if you think you already know filmmaking, or can ignore basic filmmaking principles and go rogue, you still need to read this vital book, cover to cover, to be successful. Learn from a pro all you need to know about visualization, production design, storyboards, shot composition, editing, staging, framing, lighting, sound, camera angles, POV, transitions, and segues.”

Elizabeth English, Moondance International Film Festival, festival founder, executive director

“I have used *Shot by Shot* in my directing classes since it first came out. It’s an essential guide on the craft of screen direction, filled with examples for aspiring filmmakers. The tools for creating the image have changed, but a director still needs to understand how to cover and break down a scene. An all-time classic text, and a must-read! ”

Jacqueline Frost, Professor of Cinema and Television Arts, California State University, Fullerton; author, *Cinematography for Directing*

“No other film book has had as much influence as Steven D. Katz’s *Shot by Shot*. A quarter century ago, it was the book of choice amongst filmmakers young and old, debut and experienced. Now, after the wave of so-called internet directing experts, *Shot by Shot* remains the single most clear and concise film-directing tome there is. Steve makes the complicated simple and the craft of directing approachable.”

Elliot Grove, founder, Raindance Film Festival, British Independent Film Awards

“Whether I need a quick refresher on how to plan ‘the line’ when shooting a three-person scene or want to review the constantly evolving world of previsualization, Steven’s book is an invaluable resource. With hundreds of examples of storyboards, CG renders, shooting layouts, photographs, and stills from films, this book doesn’t just talk the talk, it walks the walk, clearly illustrating everything being discussed. I’ll be referring to it for the rest of my career anytime I’m stuck how to move a scene from the page to the stage.”

Jesse Koester, director

“An essential book on the art, craft, and history of cinematic storyboarding that also pays tribute to some of the form’s greatest practitioners.”

Daniel Raim, Oscar®-nominated writer and director, *The Man on Lincoln's Nose, Harold and Lillian*

"Steve Katz's *Shot by Shot* was *the* book on directing to read when it first came out. This new version has only gotten better, making it a virtual 'film school' in a book. Highly recommended for anyone looking to understand the inner workings of what goes on behind the camera."

Ralph Singleton, producer, *A Clear and Present Danger, Cagney & Lacey* (Emmy Award for Best Drama) & **Joan Singleton**, screenwriter, producer, *Because of Winn-Dixie*

"From master storyteller Steven D. Katz, the 25th anniversary edition of *Shot by Shot* is an invaluable classroom tool. Well organized and dynamic, it takes students from visualizing their concepts to efficiently and creatively executing their production plans."

Anne Slatton, MFA, film professor, University of North Carolina

"When I read my first copy of *Shot by Shot* 25 years ago, I was thrilled. Finally someone had written a book that would give me the insights I needed into visual storytelling. It has remained by my side whenever I am preparing for a production or am in production. As much as I was looking forward to reading the 25th anniversary edition of Steven's great book, I was not prepared for yet another rush of excitement as I absorbed every detail, every nuance, every insight. And this edition is totally up to date with new programs, technology, and even a website to stay current with new developments. Bravo. I need Steven and this amazing book at my fingertips to open my mind to the most powerful and meaningful ways to bring my stories to the screen. Thank you, Steven. Bless you for opening my eyes and expanding my world of storytelling."

Mark W. Travis, director; writer; coach; author, *Directing Feature Films, The Film Director's Bag of Tricks*

"*Shot by Shot* has been on filmmakers' shelves for a long time. After a careful reading of Katz's book, you will be a better director. Filmmakers have been studying it for twenty-five years!"

Bart Weiss, associate professor, University of Texas at Arlington; director, Dallas VideoFest

"Filled with beautiful, instructive illustrations and images to help any filmmaker realize his or her vision, *Shot by Shot* is an incredible resource unmatched by anything online. Katz has taken his extensive experience and encyclopedic knowledge of filmmaking and transformed them into crucial tools."

Michele Yamazaki-Terpstra, toolfarm.com; coauthor, *Green Screen Made Easy*

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by
Shot

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by Steven D. Katz

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For my parents, Stan and Betty Katz

Acknowledgments

The following acknowledgments were written in 1990, and several of the people listed below have passed away, including several close friends. Their unique personalities and contributions to the arts live on in the films they made.

I would like to express my thanks to the people who gave me valuable assistance in the preparation of this book. Assistance is an inadequate term for all the patience, time, and knowledge that colleagues and friends generously provided. First is my friend Michael Wiese, who as a filmmaker and publisher thought that a book on the subject of visualization would be of interest to other filmmakers.

Both Joe Musso, president of the Production Illustrators and Matte Painters Union, and Gene Allen, executive director of the Society of Motion Picture and Television Art Directors, were not only highly informative about their respective crafts, but saved me months of research by helping to arrange the many interviews with their members whose illustration and design work appear in these pages.

Camille Abbott, a production illustrator, and legendary art director Harold Michelson gave generously of their time and expertise in helping me prepare the text and diagrams explaining the Michelson method for camera angle projection. In addition, they offered valuable insights into the craft of continuity illustration and encouragement by way of their enthusiasm for the movies.

Special thanks to Steven Spielberg, who was especially generous in providing me with the lengthy storyboard sequence from *Empire of the Sun*, a portion of which appears in the book; to Robert C. Carringer of Illinois University, who was consistently able to direct me to useful sources of information on production design on the rare occasions he was unable to answer questions personally; to Mary Corliss of the Film Stills Archives in the Museum of Modern Art, who provided the storyboards from *The Birds* and valuable suggestions for researching production design.

The artwork from *Beverly Hills Cop II* was provided by Paramount Pictures; artwork from *La Bamba* is courtesy of Columbia Pictures; and *Blade Runner* artwork is courtesy of Warner Bros. Pictures. The *Citizen Kane* art from which the reproductions were taken is in the Rare Books and Special Collections Library of the University of Illinois. (© 1941 RKO Pictures, Inc., Ren. 1968 RKO GENERAL, INC.)

Tim Miller, the director of *Deadpool*, generously allowed the use of an elaborate previsualization sequence designed at his own studio, Blur. I have known Tim for twenty years and have watched with admiration as he grew his storefront visual-effects shop into one of the best visual effects and animation studios in the world.

Thanks also to Wes Anderson and his storyboard illustrator on *Moonrise Kingdom*, Pat Harpin. Wes helped choose one of his favorite sequences that shows his unique visual style.

Barry Jackson, production designer, had more work to choose from than I could put in this book, so hopefully we'll be hearing more from him at www.shotbyshotbook.com.

On a more personal level, Doug Sheffer, Jim Coon, Scott Deaver, John Travers, and my longtime friend Carl Shea all lent the kind of support only friends can provide.

And then there's Milton Olshin, my witty second cousin, a highly respected visual-effects projectionist in New York City and raconteur who gave me my first visit to a movie set, my first job on a movie set, and generously helped me in many ways in the early part of my career.

Special thanks to Jane Weber for her understanding, patience, and support.

Warmest gratitude goes to my sister, Barbara, and parents, Betty and Stanley Katz, for understanding (most of the time) that the basement could be a studio, and for the continuing belief that I would someday graduate to the real thing.

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Introduction

It's been 25 years since *Shot by Shot* first hit bookstores. The original introduction made the point that finding practical experience as a new filmmaker was difficult because film gear and services were expensive. Well, that was before the digital revolution, the Internet, iMovie, and smartphones that shoot 4k video. Now everyone can make movies on their laptop or iPad — even *with* their iPad since it has a respectable video camera built in. Distribution? That's covered too with YouTube, Vimeo, Facebook, Instagram, and new outlets coming all the time. The greatest opportunity for filmmakers since the first screening of a movie in 1895 is right now.

So, fine. The technology is affordable and reasonably user-friendly, but you still have to know how to write, shoot, and edit that story that keeps you awake at night. *Shot by Shot* remains useful because while the world has changed, movies are still told in pretty much the same way today as they have been for more than a century. There are approximately 1,500 shots in a feature film — composing them and getting them in the right order is still the challenging, maddening puzzle that Griffith, Welles, Godard, Kurosawa, Scorsese, Herzog, and dozens of new directors spend their lives exploring. *Shot by Shot* was written to help make sense of the visual side of the narrative process and provide a very flexible method for developing your own directorial voice.

The departure point for the method in the book is Hollywood continuity style, the basis for 99% of the television programs and motion pictures you watch in your lifetime. And this style has certain rules. There is enormous room for exerting your point of view within the continuity style (including breaking the rules), but even with today's portable cameras and highly efficient nonlinear editing systems, you'll have more time to work on story and less on technical filmmaking if you learn how to use the film grammar you've watched your whole life.

How does *Shot by Shot* explain and teach continuity style? First by introducing the tools, which today are primarily digital, second by showing basic staging rules for most of the common arrangements of actors in a scene, and, three, showing hundreds of examples of how camera setups can be staged. These are not formulas, but explorations with subtle changes in composition that put you in the editing room with various shots to choose from. There are no right or wrong answers, but the comparison of the different solutions with commentary gives insight into what director's grapple with in building a scene.

There are also several key concepts developed in the book that are critical to understanding the relationship between the emotions and themes of a story and how framing them through a lens emphasizes, alters, and shifts the audience's perceptions.

A new section, Short Cuts, has been added detailing what a director can expect on the set and how best to prepare for a day of shooting in a quick infographic presentation. Of course, all of *Shot by Shot* is devoted to preparing the visual design for a movie, but the new workshop section covers what needs to be done when the plan has to be made up on the set. Many directors work this way, allowing the actors more freedom and participation in the development of the scene.

Overall, the new version has a number of other revisions, including new storyboards from Wes Anderson's *Moonrise Kingdom*, panels from the Coen Brothers' *The Big Lebowski*, and a previs sequence from *Deadpool*. There is now a link to an online filmmakers' resource page, with the emphasis on previs tools and techniques of interest to directors. The book has grown by a few pages and may seem like a lot of reading and detail to absorb, so take it in small bites. The ideas in the book were reverse engineered from years of problem solving and emphasize process over programmed solutions, but you'll find some of those here too.

There are no formulas for making a good scene, no good ones, at least. It would have been a lot easier to write a book that said there are, but those books are already out there. There is no getting around the fact that moviemaking is an arduous, daunting, bewildering process — it also provides one of the biggest rushes in the performing arts. If you are jumping into the movie game, *Shot by Shot* should bring you a little closer to developing into a craftsman. The art part is up to you.

About the Photographs and Storyboards Used in This Book

The photoboards used in this book were shot with a Nikon F3 and an Olympus OM-2n using a variety of fixed focal length and zoom lenses on Kodak Panatomic-X and Plus-X films. As often as possible I have tried to approximate the compositional qualities of the most widely used motion-picture formats, but for a variety of technical reasons (discrepancies in the measurement of focal lengths by lens manufacturers and the difficulty in determining exact focal lengths of zoom lenses at discreet positions throughout their range, for example), differences are inevitable.

35 mm SLR cameras use an aspect ratio of approximately 1.5:1, which is somewhere between the full Academy aspect ratio of 1.33:1 and the 1.65:1 ratio popular in Europe. Therefore, cropping was necessary during the printing stage to widen the frame to the various widescreen aspect ratios in common use for theatrically released motion pictures. There are three aspect ratios demonstrated in the book: 1.5:1, 1.85:1 normal widescreen, and the extreme widescreen proportions of CinemaScope and Panavision 70 mm, 2.35:1.

For all these reasons, the focal lengths and apertures accompanying many of the storyboard photographs should be considered estimates. Duplicating the same perspective, depth of field, focal length, and composition with a motion-picture camera and lens will necessarily require a different focal length.

In the past, production art was rarely preserved with any consistency by the movie industry. The production illustrations in this book are frequently reproductions of photocopies of original art, the originals having long since disappeared. The result is that much of the shading and tonal quality of the work is lost.

Because storyboards and production art vary considerably in size, reflecting the particular use, style of the illustrator, and preferences of the director, most of the artwork has been reduced to fit the format of the book. Some of the illustrations were reduced as much as 50%, but in all cases, the individual artists were consulted in order that the best presentation be made consistent with the space available.

Part I

Visualization: The Process

"Vision is the art of seeing things invisible."

Jonathan Swift

1 Visualization

If you've ever seen a boy lying in the grass, eye level with his toy soldiers, then you've seen the impulse that is the visual basis of the Hollywood movie. The boy is framing the action as a filmmaker might, eye level with his miniature figures so that charge and retreat are all around him. Up close, the toys are no longer painted miniatures, but life-size warriors moving in a world that is not to be observed but experienced.

In his landmark book *Qu'est-ce que le cinéma?* French film critic André Bazin used the term *presence* to describe the moviegoer's sense that he is within the same spatial/temporal continuum as the picture on the screen. He regarded this illusion as the fulfillment of a tradition of verisimilitude in Western painting that began with the discovery of linear perspective during the Renaissance. This geometrical way of depicting space enabled painters to create pictures that were reasonably accurate representations of three-dimensional reality on a two-dimensional surface. Photography is able to achieve the same effect automatically, and the viewer sees a result that shares the optical qualities of human vision.

But motion pictures take the illusion one step further and convey the experience of *seeing* things as they happen or, as Bazin referred to it, presence — something that both painting and photography fail to convey completely. This is because when we view a painting or photograph we are always aware of the surface of the picture. Something very different happens when we are viewing a film. Instead of seeing the picture surface, we are included in the pictorial space projected on the screen as if it were real three-dimensional space.

The Continuity Style

The nearly perfect illusion of depth was what set motion pictures apart from all other methods of reproduction in the graphic arts at the turn of the century. The editorial and photographic strategies of Griffith, Porter, and the other pioneer filmmakers built on this basic tendency of the motion-picture viewing experience, avoiding any sort of technique that drew attention to the illusion itself. This was in keeping with their immediate artistic heritage, largely nineteenth-century theater, literature, magazine, and book illustration and photography. As it turns out, many of the basic strategies of the movies that we have come to call cinematic, or at least the conventions of what is known as the "continuity style," were developed or suggested in the popular art of the nineteenth century.

Today, the style has broadened to include some of the conventions of cinéma vérité, experimental, and avant-garde film, but is largely faithful to the original storytelling strategies of the Hollywood movie, which by now is an international style. The ideas in this book are taken from this basic vocabulary of techniques, but filmmakers will find that learning this style should not inhibit experimentation. In fact, in the past decade both stereoscopic viewing and VR have been accompanied by claims that these new ways of watching movies will provide new ways to tell stories. At best, this is partly true, and the idea that these new technologies will substantially change movie storytelling is greatly exaggerated — as neuroscience is likely to prove.

My expectation is that filmmakers who learn the various framing and staging strategies of the continuity style will be better prepared to strike out on their own and develop a unique style.

Visualization is only one step in the filmmaking process. A film cannot be designed solely on paper or a computer, whether this is the script or a storyboard. Storyboards or any other visualization tool will change when the shooting begins. The goal, however, is not to visualize to eliminate decisions on the set or to streamline the production process (though this is often how it's sold). Visualization is a way of coming up with new visual and narrative ideas before shooting begins. This may be merely a single arresting image in a scene or the decision to stage action for a long sequence shot rather than fast cutting. It may help you find the dramatic center of the scene, or it may reveal a dishonest line of dialogue. If the staging of a scene is previewed on paper and subsequently improved, then the storyboard has helped focus the vision in the final film.

Underlying this approach to filmmaking is the drive to create great sequences. From the moment a script exists and production commences, the director should strive to make every shot and every sequence as compelling as talent, time, and money permit.

2 Production Design

Whether or not the director is the main visualizer for a film, the development and implementation of the visual plan is the responsibility of the production designer and his team. This organization of the creative forces is necessary whenever storytellers hope to control the time and setting of a picture, even when the subjects are simple events set in the present. The notion of designing the mise-en-scène of a film, rather than photographing available reality, first evolved in part because of the needs of fiction, but also because of the economic considerations of production — the twin engines of evolution and change in the Hollywood studio system from its very beginnings.

The emergence of the art director as a creative and key organizational position began early in the silent period when movies were still greatly influenced by the theater. Typically, the art director was a scenic designer, and the early sets were little more than painted backdrops and some furniture. The move from stage flats to constructed sets was inevitable — D.W. Griffith, with his refinement of multiple viewpoints, had seen to that. But it was the short-lived influence of the Italian cinema that challenged Griffith and the rest of the American movie industry to match Italian production standards.

Two Italian productions, *Quo Vadis?* (1912) and *Cabiria* (1913), were the most ambitious and technically sophisticated films of their time. Both used fully constructed and meticulously detailed sets, artificial lighting effects, and limited moving camera, introducing epic cinema. Their enormous success briefly overshadowed Griffith's work during this period, but inspired to a considerable extent the scope of his most innovative mature films, *Judith of Bethulia* (1914), *Birth of a Nation* (1915), and *Intolerance* (1916).

The rapidly increasing complexity of the physical production of a movie during the mid-teens, including constructed sets and the greater mobility of the camera, required greater cooperation between the art director and the cinematographer. Art directors discovered that the scenic illusions they were expected to provide were dependent on the camera. They learned to use partial sets to exploit the camera’s limited view, and matte shots and models to replace painted backdrops. By necessity, art directors were involved in the photographic decisions required to implement these new cinematic techniques and in so doing made the transition from theatrical to screen design.

As the feature became the dominant form in the movies, survival for any company meant producing films rapidly. The practice of shooting scenes out of sequence became common, and craftspeople might work on several movies simultaneously, making props, sets, or costumes in the newly built studios at Universal City, Inceville, or Culver City. Following nineteenth-century principles of mass production, jobs became specialized, and departments were established for each phase of production, including scriptwriting, set construction, properties, costumes, cinematography, and editing.

By 1915, scenery, props, and costumes built for one movie were being stored for later use on another. The departmental system in the studios required greater organization and communication between departments, and because the most complex, expensive, and labor-intensive areas were related to construction, the art director became the logical choice to administer much of the production process. Unlike the cameraman and director, the art director possessed a language in the form of blueprints, concept sketches, and models that the craftspeople in other departments understood. At the same time, the pictorial possibilities of the frame, suggested in the work of Griffith and a few other leading directors, raised the visual ante in the industry. Always on the lookout for new talent, the studios began recruiting magazine illustrators and architects to inject new ideas into the fledgling art departments and handle the increasingly ambitious productions that audiences expected. It was because the art department was able to plan a production that Hollywood became a successful movie factory capable of turning out hundreds of features and shorts throughout the silent period.

The next stage of development in the art department occurred in the ’20s with the rise of the German cinema. During World War I, several of the smaller production companies in Germany were combined into UFA GmbH (Universum Film Aktiengesellschaft), a single studio with mammoth stages and considerable state funding. This support, and the magnificent studios at Potsdam-Babelsberg, made technical and stylistic innovation driven by German Expressionism and the Kammerspielfilm possible. These two genres, one featuring fantastic imagery and the other naturalistic and somber subjects, were both darkly psychological and dependent on highly stylized settings and camera technique. In many ways UFA, and its most important directors, writers, and craftsmen — Karl Mayer, Karl Struss, Fritz Lang, F.W. Murnau, G.W. Pabst, and E.A. Dupont — set the pace for film design in the ’20s, contributing advances in mobile camerawork, subjective viewpoints, more sharply angular compositions, and an interest in using the camera to explore psychological states.

UFA incorporated the staging tradition of Wagnerian opera with its colossal and complicated sets in many films, not only showcasing the talents of the art director, but establishing that an artificial setting could add enormously to the emotional power of a film. It also proved that movies, even those with considerable exterior scenes, could be shot entirely in a controllable studio environment, which, when sound arrived at the end of the ’20s, became an even more important factor in art direction.

Hollywood wasted no time in borrowing the aesthetic innovations of UFA, first in coproductions, and later by recruiting the best European directors and cameramen while moving closer to the total studio environment approach to moviemaking. By the end of the silent period, the studio system in Hollywood was fully in place, with the art director now the head of a department that was largely responsible for the mise-en-scène of every film produced at a given studio. This resulted in the highly recognizable visual styles of the major studios during the sound period, each style generally attributed to the tastes of the supervising art director. The Twentieth Century Fox look was shaped by William Darling, Richard Day, and Lyle Wheeler; Warner Brothers had the gritty realism preferred by Anton Grot; MGM had the luxurious, high-key look of Cedric Gibbons; Paramount had the European sophistication of Hans Dreier; Universal, the moody darkness of Herman Rosse and Charles D. Hall. And at RKO, Van Nest Polglase oversaw the styling of the Astaire–Rogers musicals and *Citizen Kane*.

The ascendency of the art director continued throughout the sound period until a new title was invented for his expanded responsibilities. In 1939, William Cameron Menzies accepted an Academy Award for the newly created position of production designer for *Gone With the Wind*. Only ten years earlier, he had received the Academy Award for art direction at the first awards ceremony.

Though the production designer's specific responsibilities may vary slightly from film to film, he has a far more comprehensive role than that of the art director. In addition to designing the overall style of the sets, props, and costumes, he is also intimately involved with the shot flow and dynamic elements of film design as well. A good example of this is Menzies's contributions to *Gone With the Wind*, for which he drew thousands of elaborate continuity sketches detailing the composition, staging, and editing points for each shot of the film. Menzies helped elevate the production designer to the inner circle of the production team, joining the director, cameraman, editor, and, in some instances, the writer, as one of the prime shot and sequence designers of a film.

Production Illustration

Today, the centralized art departments of bygone studio days no longer exist and production teams are assembled for each film. Still, a production designer will try to work with people he has worked well with in the past, and the producer usually permits him to assemble his own team, lending at least some continuity to working relationships. Included in the team are the key positions of art director, prop stylist, draftsman, production illustrator, costume designer, and digital previs artist. A further development in the digital era is that these craftspeople are working on the same online network exchanging files and co-developing them in real time. This includes virtual studios in which team members may be in different parts of the world.

Each member of the art department contributes illustrations that fall into three basic categories during preproduction. This phase is often called look development, or "look dev" for short:

Concept Art: These are used to describe individual elements for a production, including sets, props, costumes, makeup, and special effects. These are individual illustrations intended to establish a style and visual direction and do not necessarily depict a shot or sequence in the film.

Plans, Elevations, and Projections: These highly technical descriptions give the exact specifications needed to manufacture or fabricate whatever is depicted in the design illustrations (much of this process is now performed in the computer using 3D and CAD software).

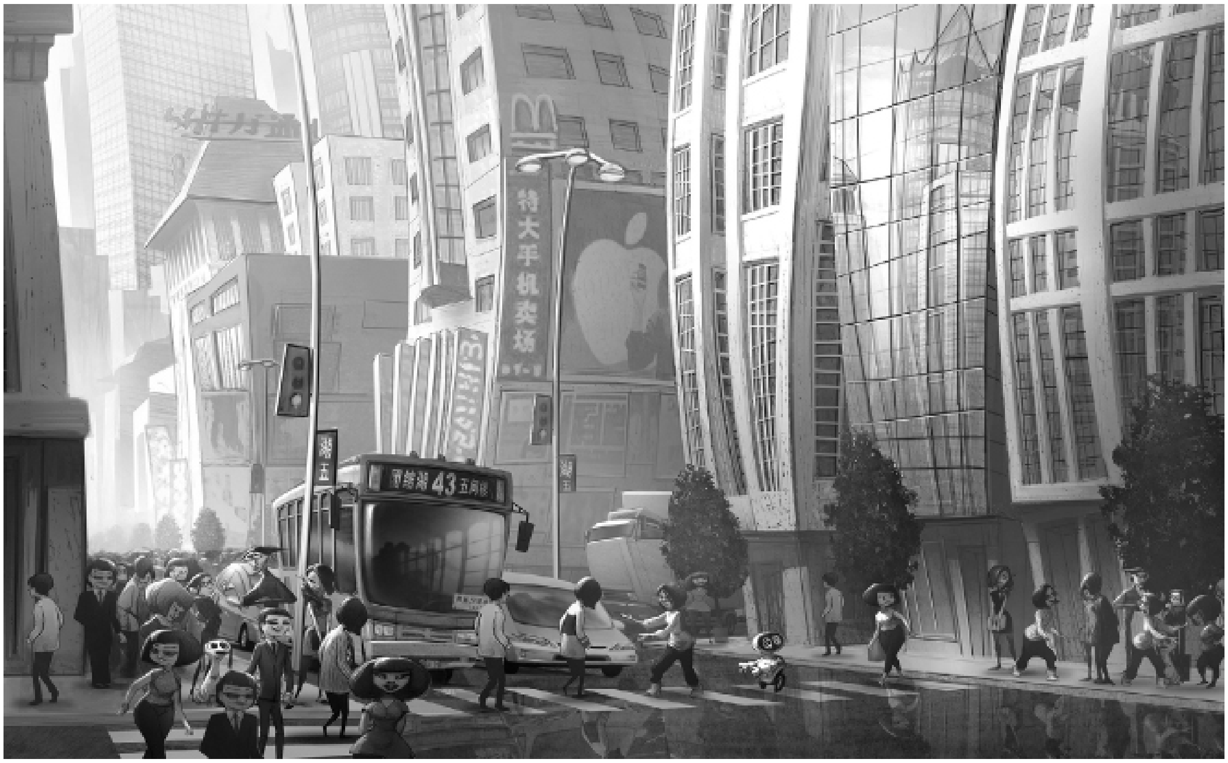
Continuity Sketches and Storyboards: These are the sequential panels that describe the individual compositions of each shot and their order in each scene of a film.

Concept Art

Concept art or production illustration includes everything from rough sketches to photorealistic paintings. Speed is important since the director wants as many ideas and concepts to look at as the budget allows. Production illustrators trained at an art college tend to have a working knowledge of 3D, animation, editing, and sound design in addition to painting and drawing. While fluency with moving pixels broadens the range of any concept artist, their main contribution is evocative, emotional images.

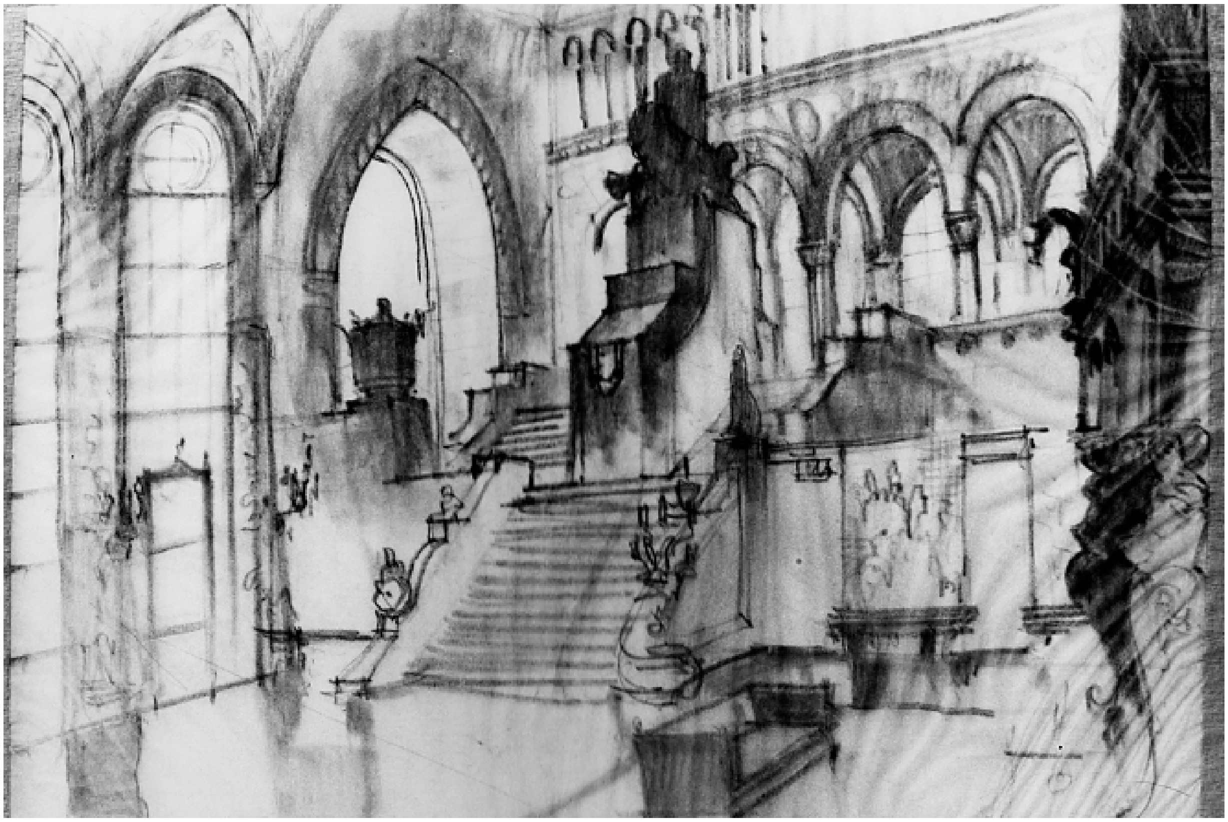
In the case of *Star Wars*, production illustrator Ralph McQuarrie initially made detailed paintings of eight major scenes, which established the pictorial tone for the entire movie and helped sell the project to a studio. Though many hundreds of additional drawings and paintings were made by other artists after McQuarrie's initial ideas, they were largely faithful to his original concepts.

Below is a digital painting by production designer Barry Jackson, who is well known for his work in animation, especially in his unique architectural designs. Concept artists create images that are scenes in the movie but also create standalone art for props, buildings, and diagrams to explain a complex set. When putting the team together, a production designer may hire specialists, as most artists are known for certain "looks" or an individual style. An artist known for masculine extreme action is not likely to be the first choice for an animated movie; however, most concept artists have a wide range of styles, a necessity since the majority of artist are freelancers and are reluctant to turn down work. The art department consists of a few permanent hires, but supplemental production and storyboard artists may be brought in for a particular scene when the core team has not been able to produce a design the director likes.

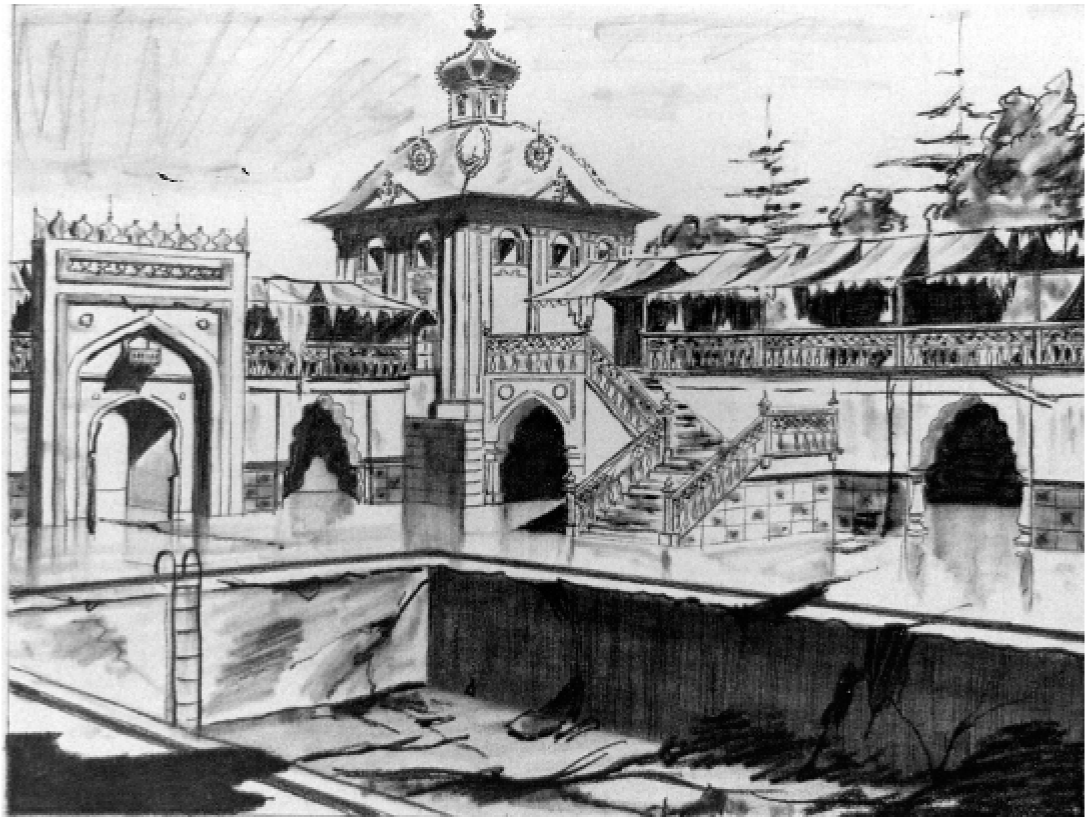


Production painting for *SMART* by Barry Jackson

On this page and next, two rare concept sketches for *Citizen Kane*. The first, below, is the great hall in Kane's estate, Xanadu.

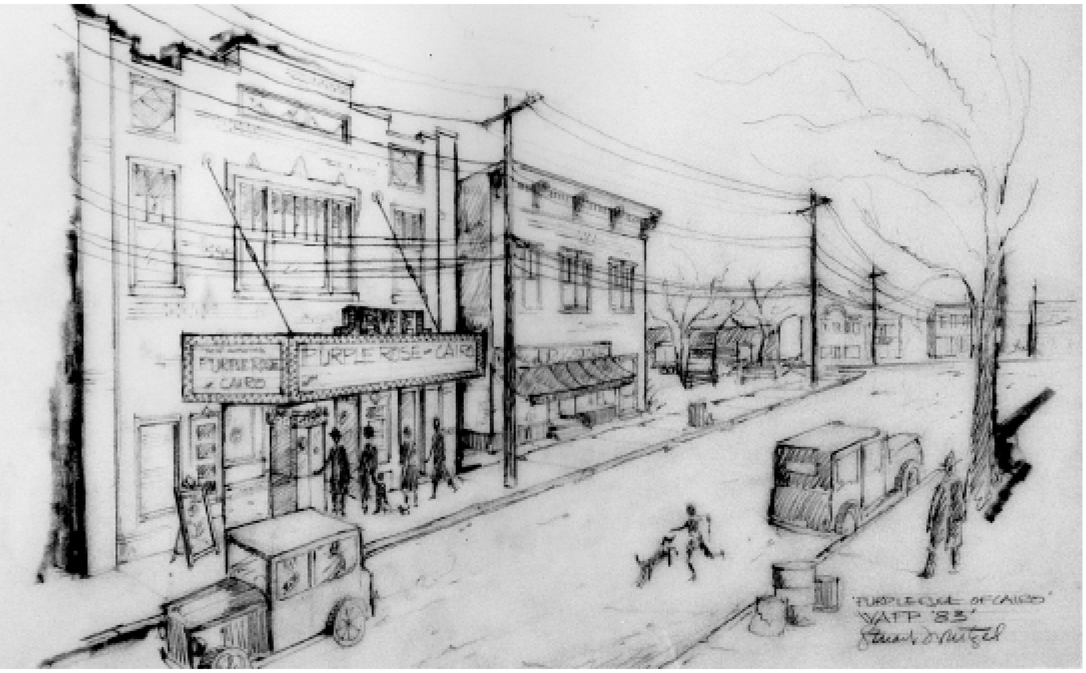


Concept sketch for *Citizen Kane* — Interior of the great hall at Xanadu.

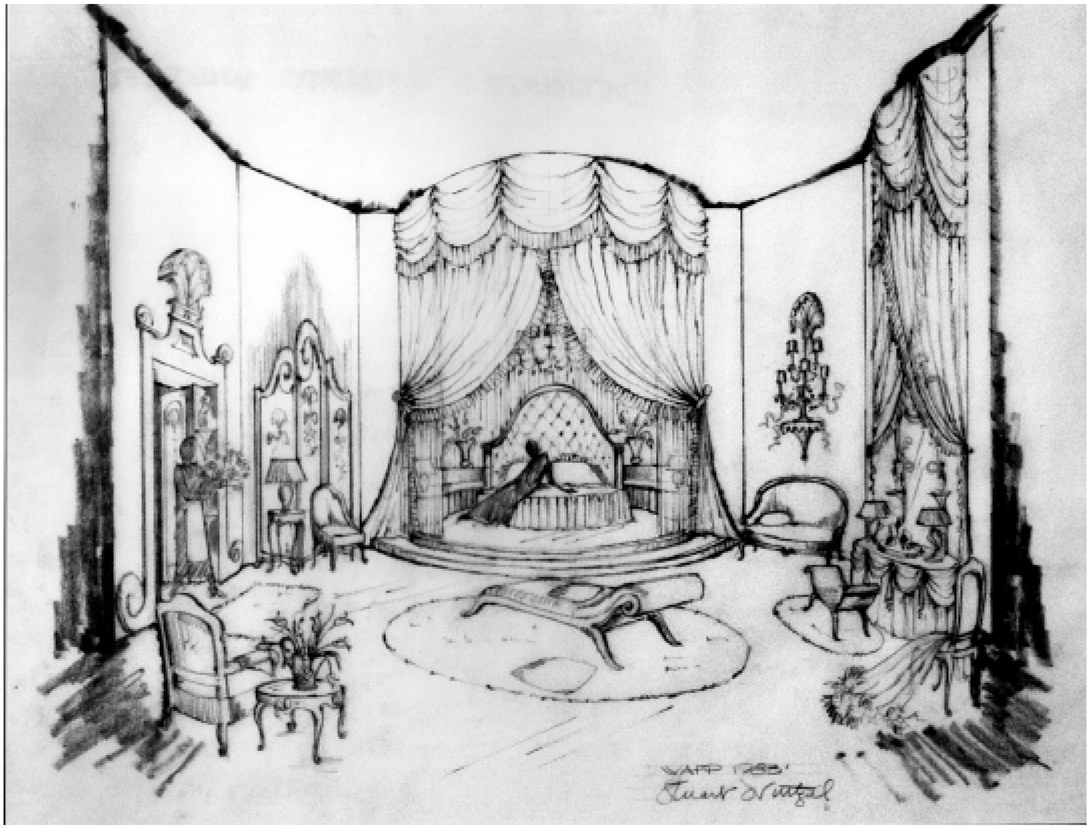


Concept sketch of the deteriorated awnings and empty swimming pool at the bathhouse for *Citizen Kane*.

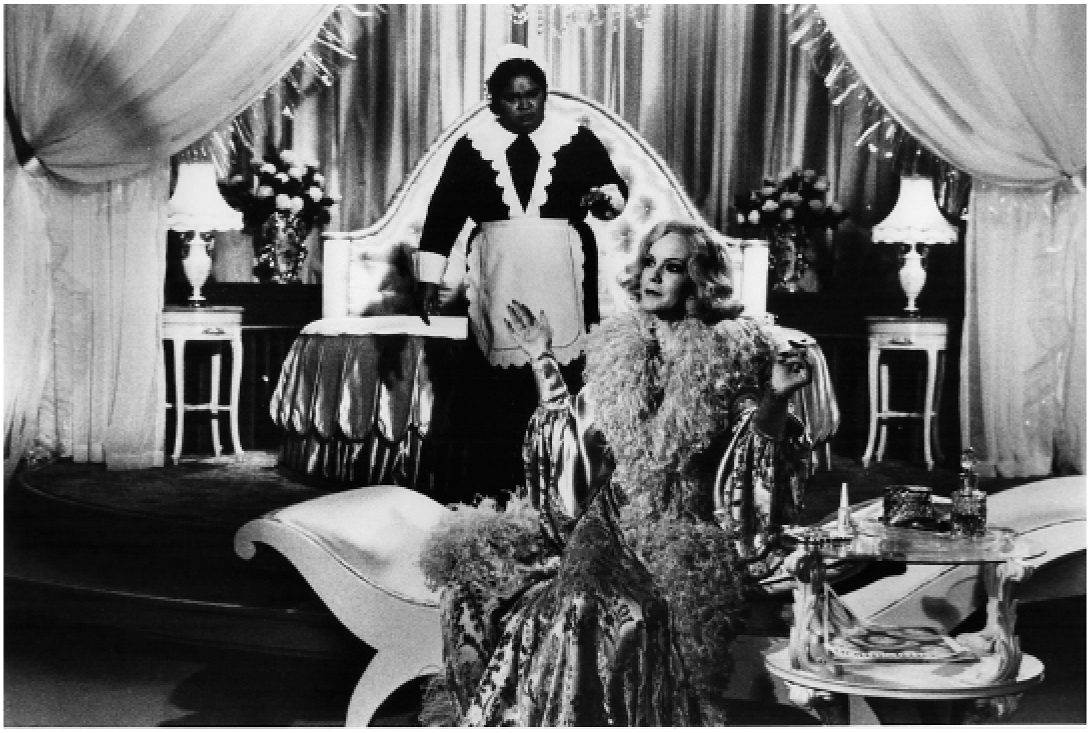
Another example of concept illustration, set sketches for a beautifully realized scene in *The Purple Rose of Cairo* by production designer Stuart Wurtzel, appear above. Accompanying the illustration is a photograph of the set as it appeared in the film. Since *The Purple Rose of Cairo* featured a film within a film, Wurtzel had to create both the real world of the 1930s and a convincing re-creation of a studio set for a drawing-room movie comedy of the same period.


PURPLE ROSE of CAIRO
PURPLE ROSE — CAIRO
'PURPLE ROSE OF CAIRO'
WAPP '83'
Stuart Wurtzel

The Purple Rose of Cairo — Set sketch by Stuart Wurtzel.

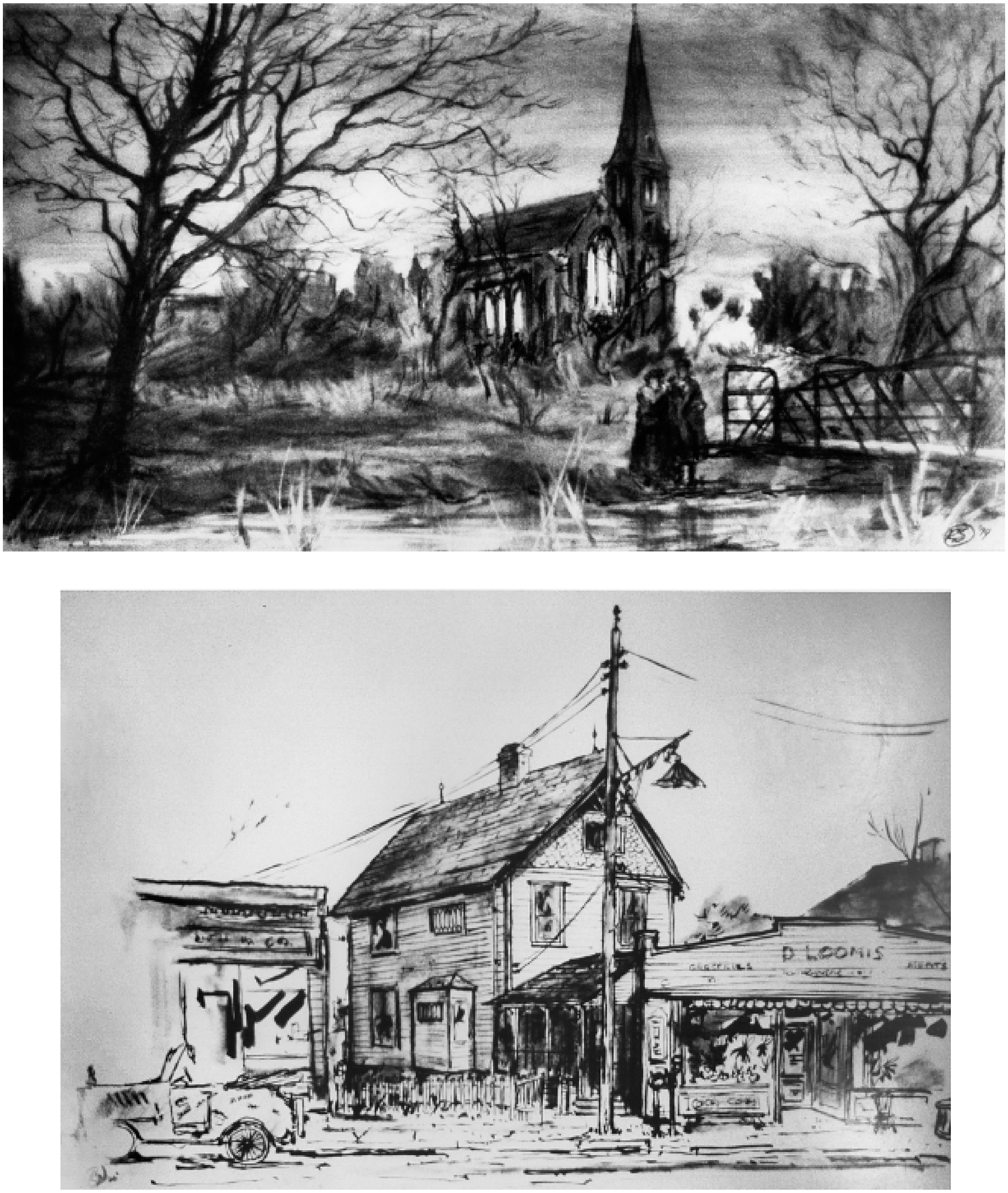

WAPP 1983'
Stuart Wurtzel

The Purple Rose of Cairo — Bedroom set sketch by Stuart Wurtzel.



The Purple Rose of Cairo — Bedroom set as it appeared in the film.

Following these illustrations are two set sketches by Richard Sylbert, the production designer for such films as *Chinatown, The Graduate, Catch-22*, and *Dick Tracy*. His set sketches for *Reds* and *Splendor in the Grass* are examples of an assured and illustrative style.



Set sketches by Robert Sylbert. Top: *Reds;* Bottom: *Splendor in the Grass*.

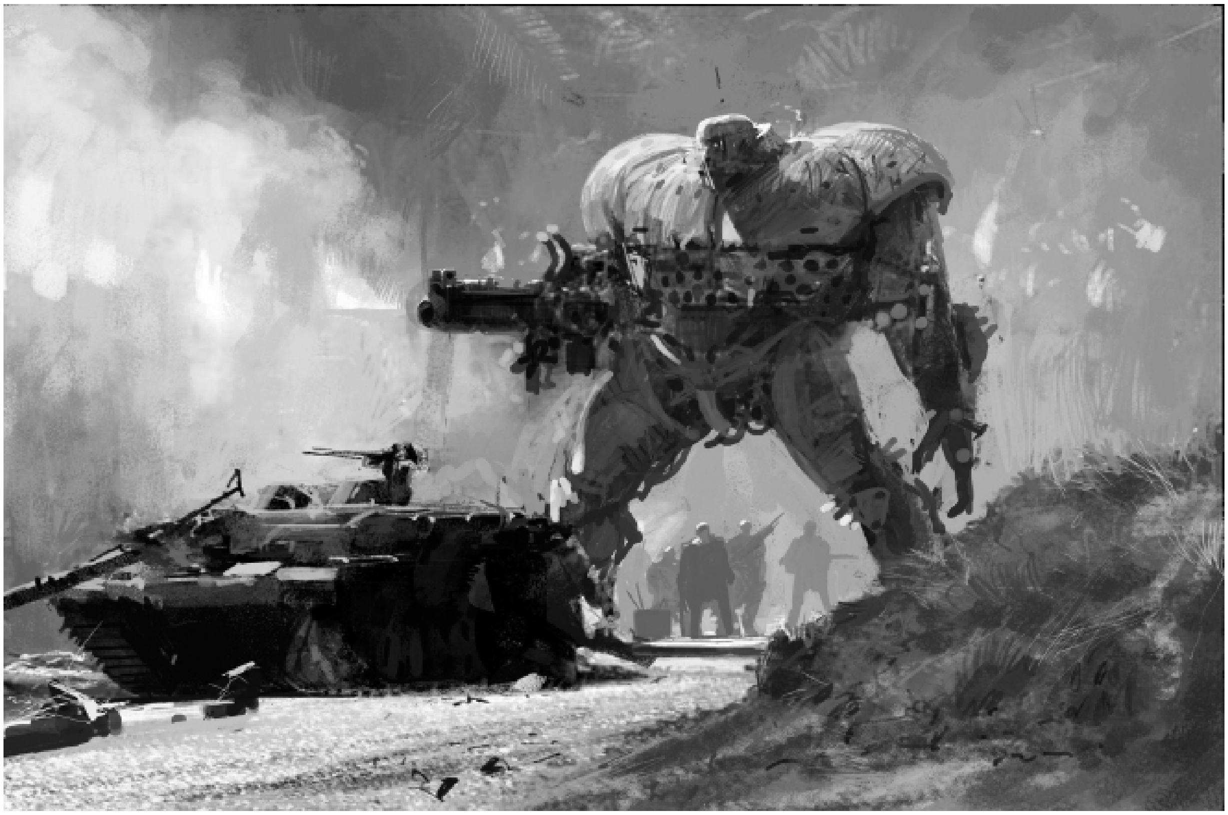
The 21st Century Art Department

The computer is the hub of a modern movie art department. Production schedules and assets are managed in Excel, Office Project, or Shotgun software while artists create work directly in the computer with devices such as the Wacom tablet to draw and paint in Photoshop or Painter. Or, they may be using ZBrush and Maya for modeling and rendering. This data is shared across departments. A virtual model of a car might be handed off to an illustrator as a guide to his painting, or a digital modeler might receive a concept sketch of a car as a guide. 2D and 3D art is now interchangeable, and this mixed-media approach to design might be the work of a single artist using several software programs to complete a single image.

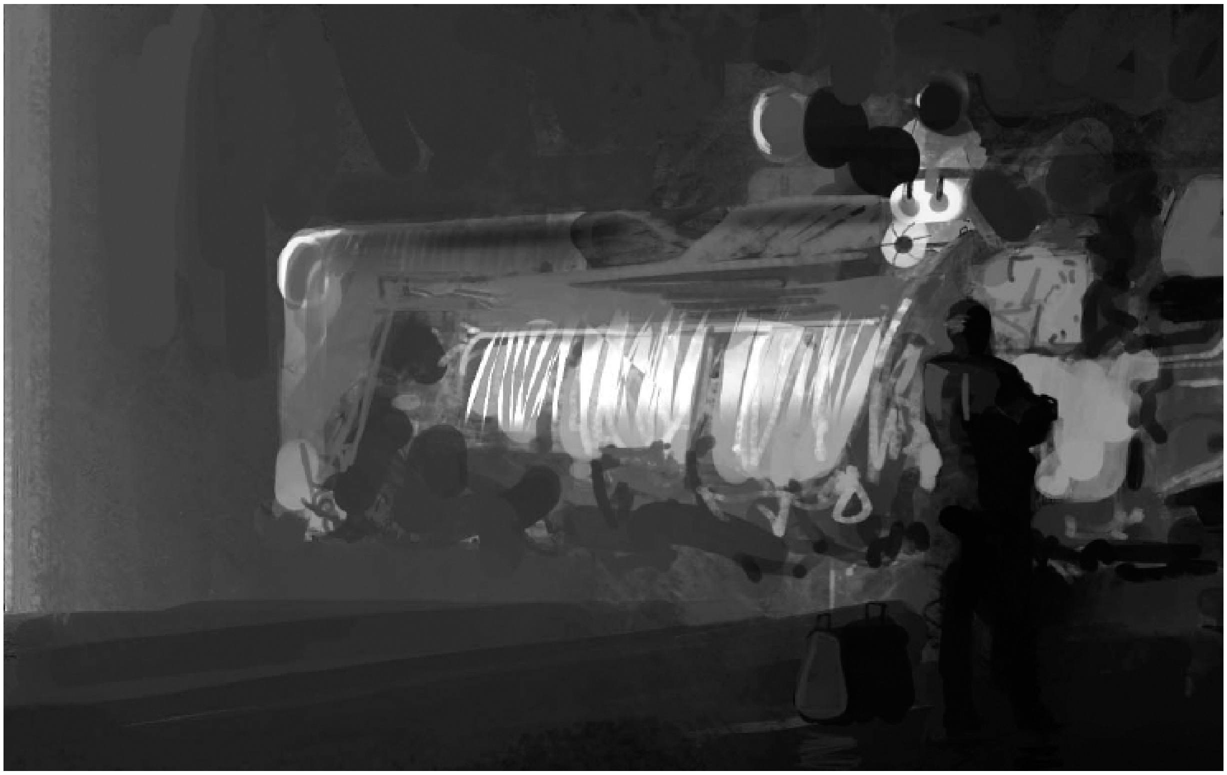
The basics of the art department, working with the director to design 1,500 shots for a feature film despite the huge changes digital production brings, is essentially the same as it was in Hollywood's Golden Age. Full-time artists will create dozens if not hundreds of paintings and storyboards over the course of several months to a year to prepare for 4–6 weeks of shooting.

Digital Painting

Beginning with the arrival of Photoshop in 1990 production illustrators began moving to create concept art and storyboards in the computer. In the early 2000s, the number of artists creating art digitally exploded as online sites such as Pinterest, Concept Art World, and DeviantArt demonstrate. Craig Mullins, who began his art career using a Dubner Paintbox way back in 1983, was brought into George Lucas's Industrial Light and Magic at the time brothers John Knoll and Thomas Knoll launched their image-editing software Adobe Photoshop. John Knoll was then a visual-effects artist at ILM, and Mullins quickly became the best-known and influential digital painter at work in the movies. While Mullins creates many photorealistic matte paintings, his gift for economy is most present in his digital sketch paintings. His work is a great example of how to say a great deal with only a few brushstrokes.



Mech Desert. Digital Painting by Craig Mullins



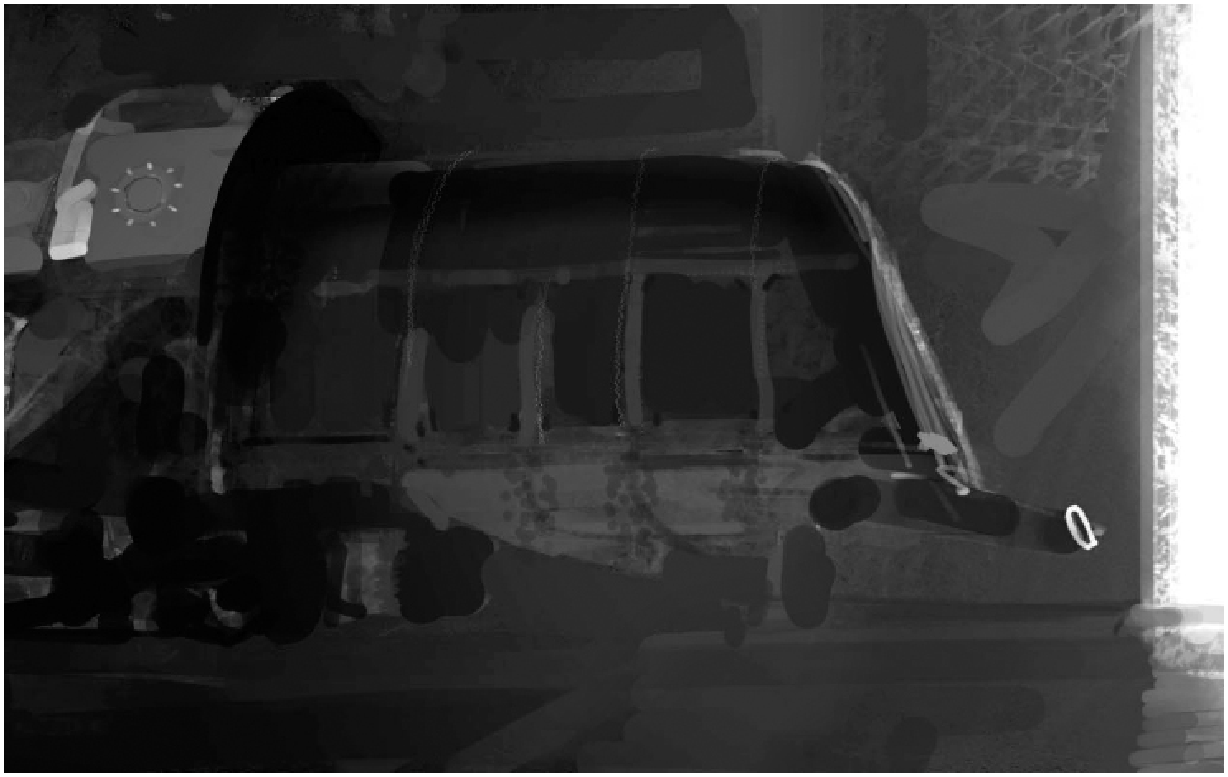
Tractor Sled. Digital Painting by Craig Mullins

Concept art is disposable, at least until a coffee table book of the all the production art is collected to promote the movie. Disposable means that even though a finished painting may look beautiful, on a large production the director and production designer use this highly finished art for visual exploration. The result is that with paintings submitted by several artists every week for several months as much 80% of the work is rejected. If the budget permits, the director uses full paintings until he gets the look he wants. That's because the creative process of the art department is one of progressive refinement. With a dozen artists working full-time to create production art, ideas are circulating and ricocheting within the team. So while a car design in a city painting is approved, the architecture behind it might be rejected. However, the approved car design is now being used by the rest of the team in new paintings.

On page 16 is a character design by production illustrator Randy Gaul. This highly detailed painting for the movie *Beowulf* was created entirely from the imagination without reference. Gaul, an artist at Industrial Light and Magic and other major studios, created hundreds of designs as part of a team of twenty llustrators. A painting at this level may take a week to complete.

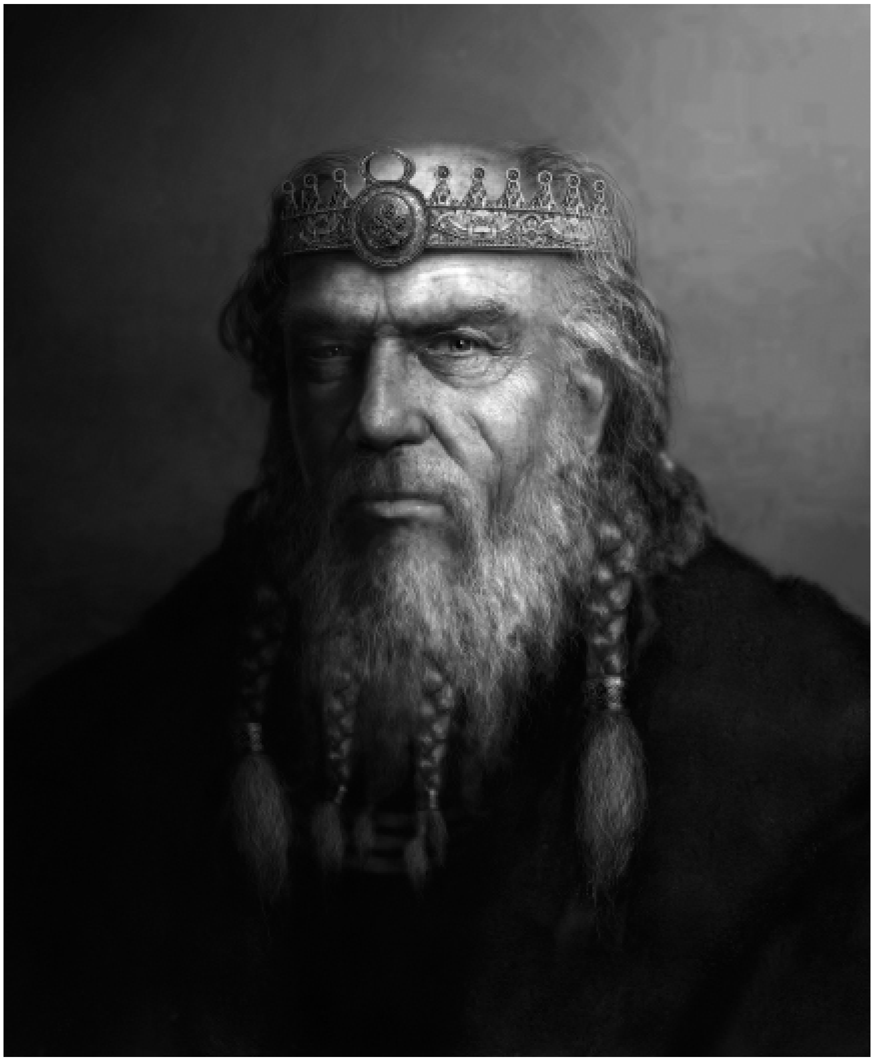
Architectural Drawings/Computer-Assisted Design (CAD)

The art department is tasked with making sets, costumes, and props. For a blockbuster fantasy film that's essentially world building. Once the concept artists have approved designs or at least ideas in a late stage of development, 3D artists are modeling dimensionally accurate buildings, cars, sets, and landscapes working from the sketched designs. Set design is typically done in an architectural or CAD program that exports a file format that can be shared with the animators working in a program such as Maya, Houdini, or Cinema 4D. Both VectorWorks Spotlight and SketchUp (with LayOut) are widely used for 3D architectural design. They can both be used to create blueprints and the tech plans needed by set building crews. However, since the art department is all-digital, artwork flows from one department to another and this includes 3D models that can be used in previs or used as reference for a concept artist.



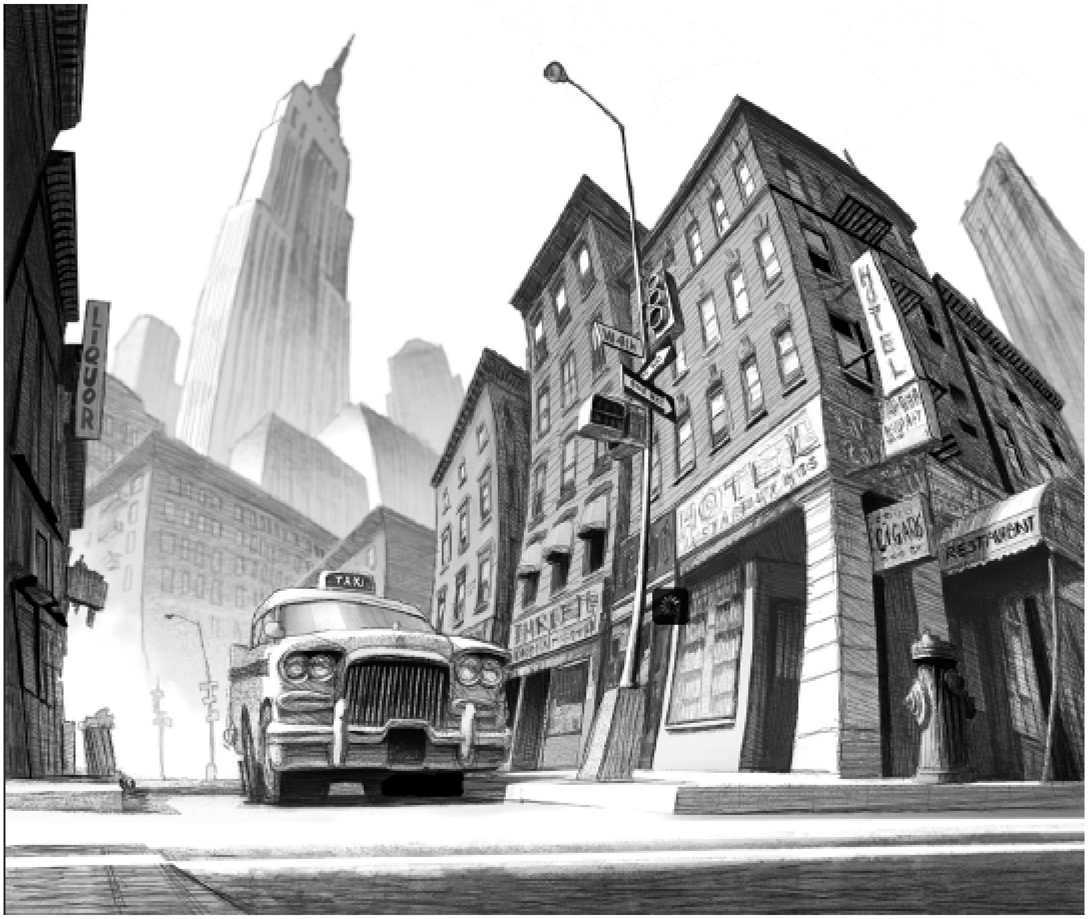
Production designer Barry Jackson, a traditionally trained painter, has become a leading digital artist using Maya and Photoshop to create his unique style. Jackson is well known for his use of twisted perspective and extreme angles as seen in his NYC taxi concept. Following is a design from *Horton Hears a Who!* showing Jackson's strong sense of narrative composition for whimsical subjects.

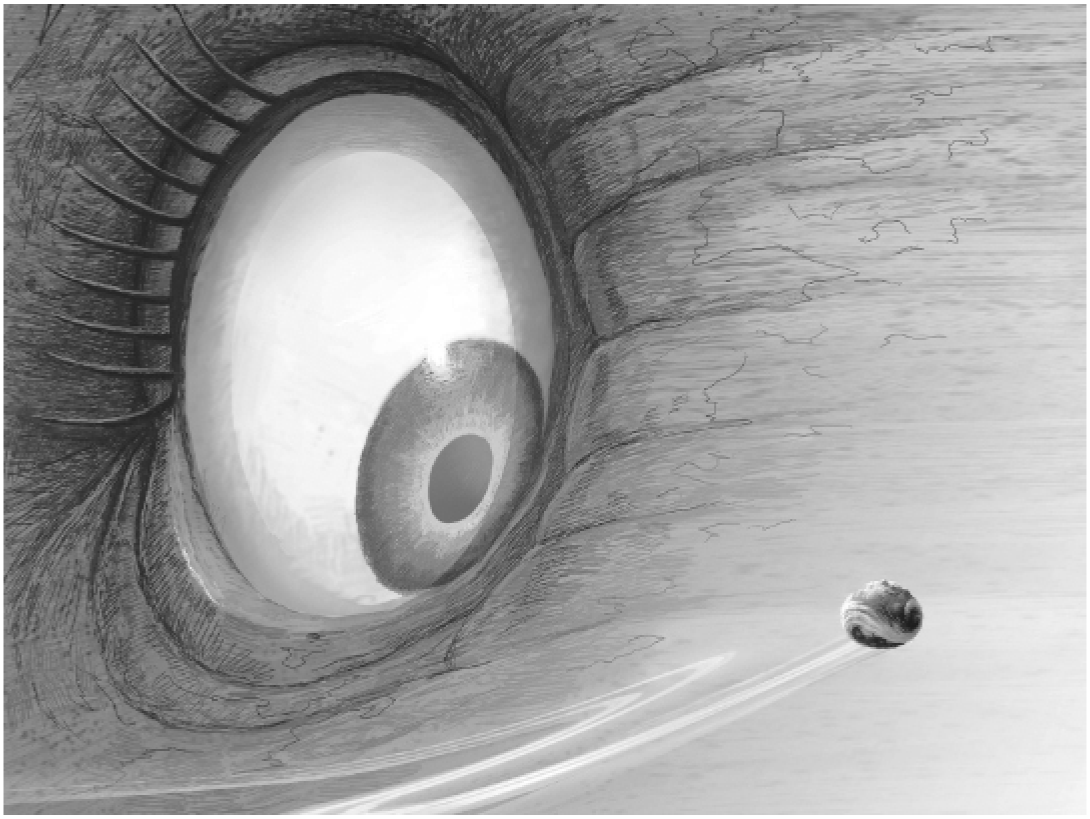
A 3D model with CAD data can be sent to set shops, machinists, and service bureaus offering rapid prototyping to create full scale or miniature physical models for actual use on set. CAD files are just a numerical description of an object that can be formatted to be used by a 3D printer or a CNC (Computer Numerical Control) system to create a model according to the artist's design. For example, a model of the Death Star or a physical model of China's Forbidden City can be created in various sizes using rapid prototyping.



Character design by production illustrator Randy Gaul.

Traditional fabricators making set and location models or miniatures by hand either for architectural or presentation clients can still be found, but 3D prototyping dominates the field. Despite this, the old school method of staging toy soldiers on a miniature set has a very different feel than viewing the same scene in the computer and may have important advantages; for example, providing a greater sense of *presence*, again, Bazin's term. You view a real model in actual space while the computer only *shows* a 2D illusion of depth. VR may bring us that much closer to an illusion of the physical world, but at least for a while longer a model you can hold in your hand inspires ideas differently than looking at a computer screen.


LIQUOR
TAXI
HOTEL
CIGARS
RESTAURANT



Digital sketches by Barry Jackson. Top: *Low angle NYC*; Bottom: *Horton Hears a Who!*

Continuity Sketches and Storyboards

The detailed use of continuity sketches (as they were originally called in live action) probably began with Walt Disney in his first animated films. Disney himself was inspired years before by the first truly naturalistic animator, Windsor McKay, who was best known as an editorial cartoonist and creator of the legendary comic strip, *Little Nemo in Slumberland*, at the turn of the twentieth century. There is no record of McKay storyboards, but he penciled all his own animation cels and drew a hugely popular comic strip, a precursor to storyboards. Years later, Webb Smith became the Disney animator credited with the invention of the storyboard in the early ’30s, but this is a specialized use of the term. Continuity sketches (six to a page) showing the important action and cutting points in Disney’s *Oswald the Lucky Rabbit* series were used as early as 1927. The following year, continuity scripts containing key panels and typed descriptions of action for *Steamboat Willie* were also routine at Disney. What Smith contributed a few years later was the display of dozens of continuity sketches pinned to a single large panel or board, usually 4 × 8 feet — hence the term storyboards — allowing the board to be carried from one studio office to another. It also let animators, especially the story-conscious Disney, to enjoy the overview of an entire story and be able to add and remove individual panels easily. Essentially nonlinear editing in the 1920s.

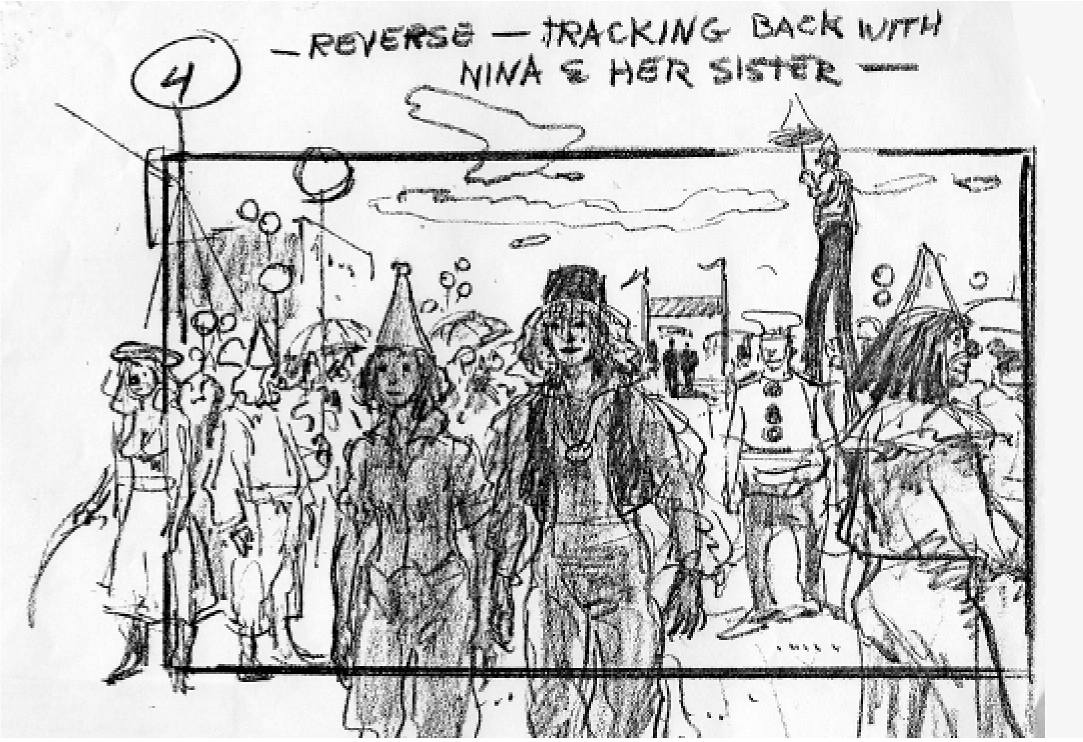
Elsewhere in the movie industry at this time storyboards were still not the accepted norm for planning live-action movies, though art departments drew set designs and individual concept sketches that indicated camera angles. But by 1932, Disney was an international success and already the supreme animator of the day. Live-action art directors working in Hollywood would certainly have been aware of some of the innovations going on at the Disney Studios, including the use of storyboards. Even without Disney's influence, storyboards' nearest kin, comic strips, were an established tradition for most Americans in the '30s, and the idea that a movie could be visualized in individual panels was probably an inevitable development.

Art director and Oscar-winning production designer Gene Allen (the first president of the Storyboard and Matte Painters Union in 1953; and former president of the Art Directors Guild) began his career in the Warner Brothers art department in 1937. Allen told me that continuity boards were already an established method of mapping out scenes in the mid-'30s and that at least eight fulltime continuity sketch artists were working in the art department under the supervision of department head Anton Grot. In the studio system, the physical design of a movie was handled entirely by the art department. The art director worked out set designs and costumes and the continuity of the picture, aided by the staff artists. Only after the picture had been designed on paper (and with many sets built as well) would the director and cameraman join the picture. This procedure was extremely efficient, and if it resulted in generic graphic solutions much of the time, it also permitted major stars and directors to make as many as three pictures a year. When John Huston began directing at the height of this system, he knew the value of preplanning. Years later Huston would say, "I completely storyboarded *The Maltese Falcon* because I didn't want to lose face with the crew: I wanted to give the impression I knew what I was doing."

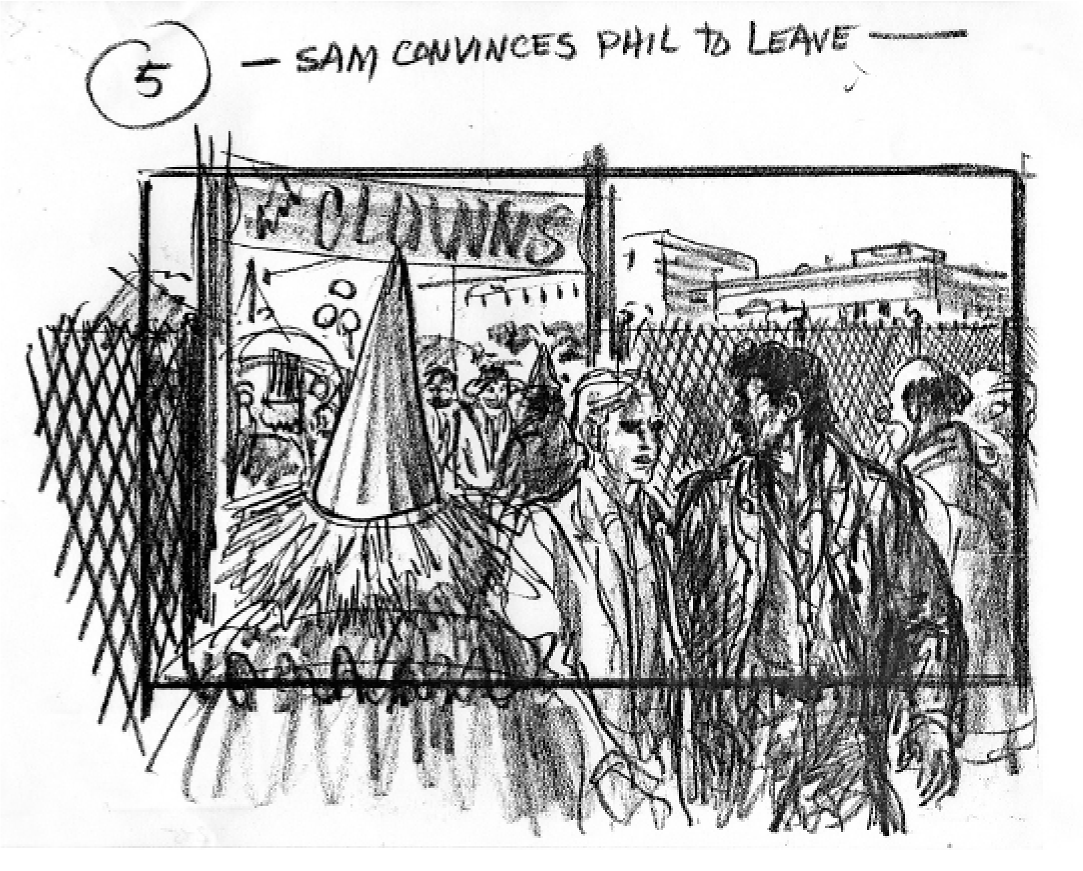
Under the studio system, the use of storyboards was kept from the public and press because the building of directorial reputations was easier if all the ideas in a film were credited to him. This all changed in the 1970s when Steven Spielberg and George Lucas celebrated pulp illustrators, comic books, and Hitchcock's use of storyboards in the making of their own pictures. In the 80s, Francis Ford Coppola experimented with an early electronic/computer production pipeline for *One From the Heart*. All this has been over-shadowed in the past decade as serious tools for the entire production of a movie are in half the households in the United States. The computer has become the studio. It also concentrates much of the creative process in the hands of just one person. This is the age of the writer/director/cinematographer/editor.

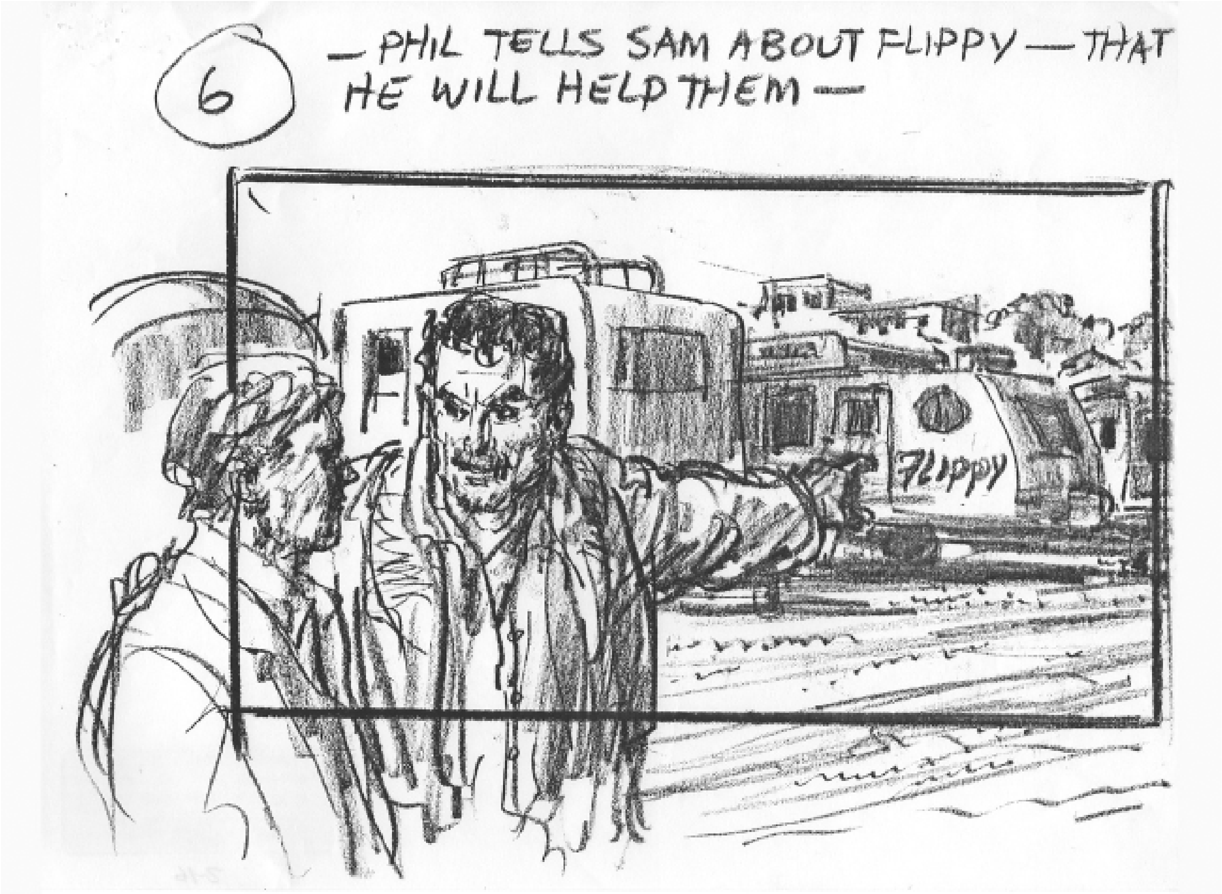
Of the several types of production illustration, the storyboard is the most useful tool the director has for visualizing his ideas and the one most directly related to his responsibilities. In the next chapter, we will look at the work of individual continuity artists and the wide range of styles and approaches they use in planning the shot flow of a film.

An example of storyboard art for the movie *Her Alibi* begins below. As you will see, Hollywood production illustrator Mentor Huebner draws the entire scene of the action and frames the subject afterward as a cinematographer might. Not all storyboard artists use this technique, but it is particularly useful in indicating panning shots and camera movement.


4
— REVERSE — TRACKING BACK WITH NINA & HER SISTER —

Storyboard by Mentor Huebner for *Her Alibi*


5
— SAM CONVINCES PHIL TO LEAVE —
CLOWNS


6
— PHIL TELLS SAM ABOUT FLIPPY — THAT HE WILL HELP THEM —
Flippy

Top and bottom: Storyboards by Mentor Huebner for *Her Alibi*

3 Storyboards

The late Maurice Zuberano, one of the most respected production illustrators and art directors in the trade, has called the storyboard the “diary of the film.” If so, it is a diary written about future events. What he was getting at, though, is that the storyboard is the private record of the visualization process, one of the reasons so few of them survive intact. Frequently, it is the evidence that the look of a film was the work of someone other than the director. For directors without a strong visual sense the storyboard illustrator is the shot-flow designer, essential to the structuring, staging, and composition of shots and sequences.

Of course, there are directors who are as visually sophisticated as any member of the production staff and, in the narrative sense, perhaps more so. Hitchcock, who is probably associated with storyboarding more than any other director, used elaborate boards to refine his vision and control the filmmaking process, ensuring that his original intention was translated to the screen.

For Hitchcock, who began in films as an art director, it was also a way of making sure that he was credited with the design of his films. He liked to say that his movies were finished before they were ever made, before the cinematographer or editor touched a piece of film. This is confirmed by the fact that he rarely looked through the camera viewfinder on the set, since it was merely a photographic equivalent of a storyboard that had been approved earlier.

Hitchcock influenced a whole generation of filmmakers in the ’60s who already had affection for continuity graphics in the comics, which, like jazz and the blues, were beginning to be recognized as an American art form at that time. The most famous filmmaker of that generation, Steven Spielberg, generally recognized as the premier visualizer of the entertainment directors, has published collections of production art from his collaborations with George Lucas, bringing further attention to the use of storyboards and production illustration. Without storyboards, Spielberg’s complex staging and kinetic effects would not have the lapidary polish that has become the hallmark of his work and the goal of many new filmmakers.

It would be easy to dismiss the current interest in storyboarding as further proof that today's Hollywood filmmakers have little knowledge of fiction outside comic books and that they are more comfortable with storyboards and action than ideas. But the truth is that many films are storyboarded regardless of subject matter. It may even be that films without a great deal of action benefit more from storyboards than kinetic subjects. Even Jean-Luc Godard, who throughout his career discarded or subverted the continuity devices shared by comic strip illustrators and classical Hollywood films, used storyboards at times to work out the connections between shots. Storyboards are merely a tool and need not reflect any style or content besides what a filmmaker cares to show.

Storyboards serve two purposes: First, they allow a filmmaker to previsualize his ideas and refine them in the same way a writer develops ideas through successive drafts; secondly, they serve as the clearest language to communicate ideas to the entire production team. Admittedly, the communication value of storyboards grows with the complexity of the production, but storyboards are not restricted to action scenes and big-budget productions. Even small, dramatic films can benefit from storyboards, helping the director to refine the story.

The Director's Role in Storyboarding

Every film is a unique blend of talents and personalities, and the responsibility for the look of a film is shared in varying degrees by the production designer, director, cinematographer, and editor. In recent years, the trend has been for the director to work directly with a sketch artist, shifting some of the responsibility for continuity away from the production designer. It's important to remember, however, that a highly visual director has always been able to take charge of a picture in spite of the highly decentralized production system of today's major studios. Now that there are no longer studios to impose a house style, directors are the arbitrators of the look and theme of a movie.

Directors with some training in the graphic arts or a penchant for drawing — Hitchcock and Ridley Scott are two examples — may furnish rough storyboards of their own to be refined by the staff storyboard artist. Sherman Labby worked with Ridley Scott on the film *Blade Runner* and spoke of the evocative line drawings (affectionately named "Ridleygrams") he received for many scenes from director Scott. Director/artists have also included such stylists as Eisenstein, Fellini, and Kurosawa, all of whom have storyboarded sequences or contributed elaborate conceptual sketches to their films. Even directors without a particular skill in drafting, such as Steven Spielberg and George Miller, occasionally make stick-figure drawings to explain a specific composition or staging. Even when the director has a clear plan in mind, he will encourage the storyboard artist to contribute ideas.

Paul Power, a production illustrators with experience in comics and film, enjoys collaborating with the director working out each scene in long brainstorming sessions. Sometimes this includes reading the dialogue and acting out scenes page by page from the script with the director stopping only to make rough sketches. Later, these will be turned into more refined drawings for further discussion. His involvement in the staging and dramatic concept of a film has led Power to describe the type of illustration he does in the panels as "acting with a pencil." Power defines the production illustrator's responsibility as helping the director find the means to express his vision. In fact, the primacy of the director was a consistent theme with all the production illustrators I spoke with. In a way, the very craft of storyboarding teaches an illustrator to be flexible. Since they are accustomed to refining a sequence through constant revisions, production illustrators recognize that there are many solutions to any problem. The challenge of collaboration is interpreting the director's view of the script.

Unique in the collaboration of storyboard artists and directors is the relationship between production illustrator J. Todd Anderson and writers/directors the Coen Brothers. Anderson has storyboarded all of the Coen Brothers pictures beginning in 1987 with their second film *Raising Arizona*. Their collaborative process is simple. They generally work one scene at a time and will walk through and act out the staging. Joel, the director, has a specific shot list, and Ethan may have rough sketches he drew. The Brothers pitch the scene and Anderson will quickly draw loose thumbnail panels while they describe the action. The thumbnails consist of stick figures and shapes taking no more than 5 to 30 seconds to draw. There will also be notes and arrows to indicate motion, but the main detail in the shot is written down as they work while Anderson stores the Brother's intent in his memory. With that in his head, he works the remainder of the day to re-draw all the quick sketches into more developed panels. These are presented the next day when panels are approved or rejected. Sometimes a new idea may arise requiring a second and third pass of the sequence. This process continues for 6–8 weeks on average with every scene and setup in the movie represented in the storyboard. The end product is a Coen Brothers illustrated script with one page of panels for every page of script. The scripts are shared with the cast and crew so everyone knows exactly what the movie will look like.

Schedules

Production illustrators may work on a film for a few weeks or for more than a year, depending on the complexity of the production and the needs of the director. While it's hard to pin down an average schedule, the thorough storyboarding of an entire film, as opposed to select action sequences, usually requires a minimum of 4–6 months depending on the detail in the drawings. For large productions with elaborate sets and effects, several sketch artists may be needed and in some cases, the production designer contributes continuity sketches as well. Even when more than one artist is at work, a complex film may require a year to storyboard. It should be mentioned, however, that this longer schedule does not reflect drawing time as much as the revisions, script changes, and the competency of the director. The phrase "look dev" refers to the period of time when the director and art department identify the visual theme. Some directors have a basic visual sense of their movie and are decisive. Other directors must explore dozens of options and may be indecisive. This is a very costly limitation for a director.

INSIDE MANSION

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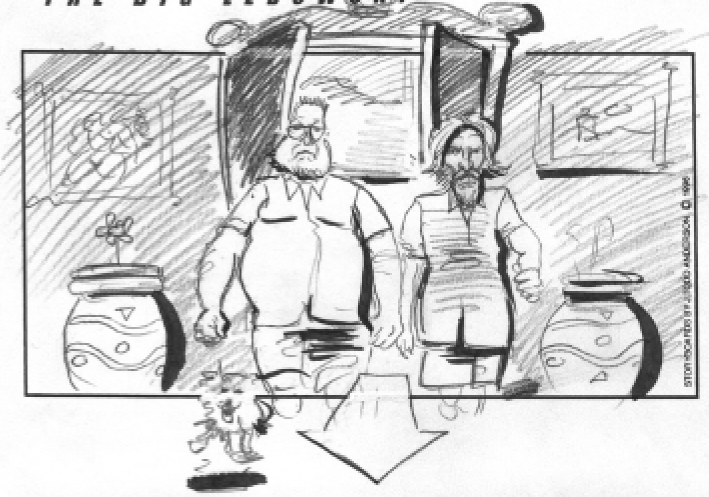
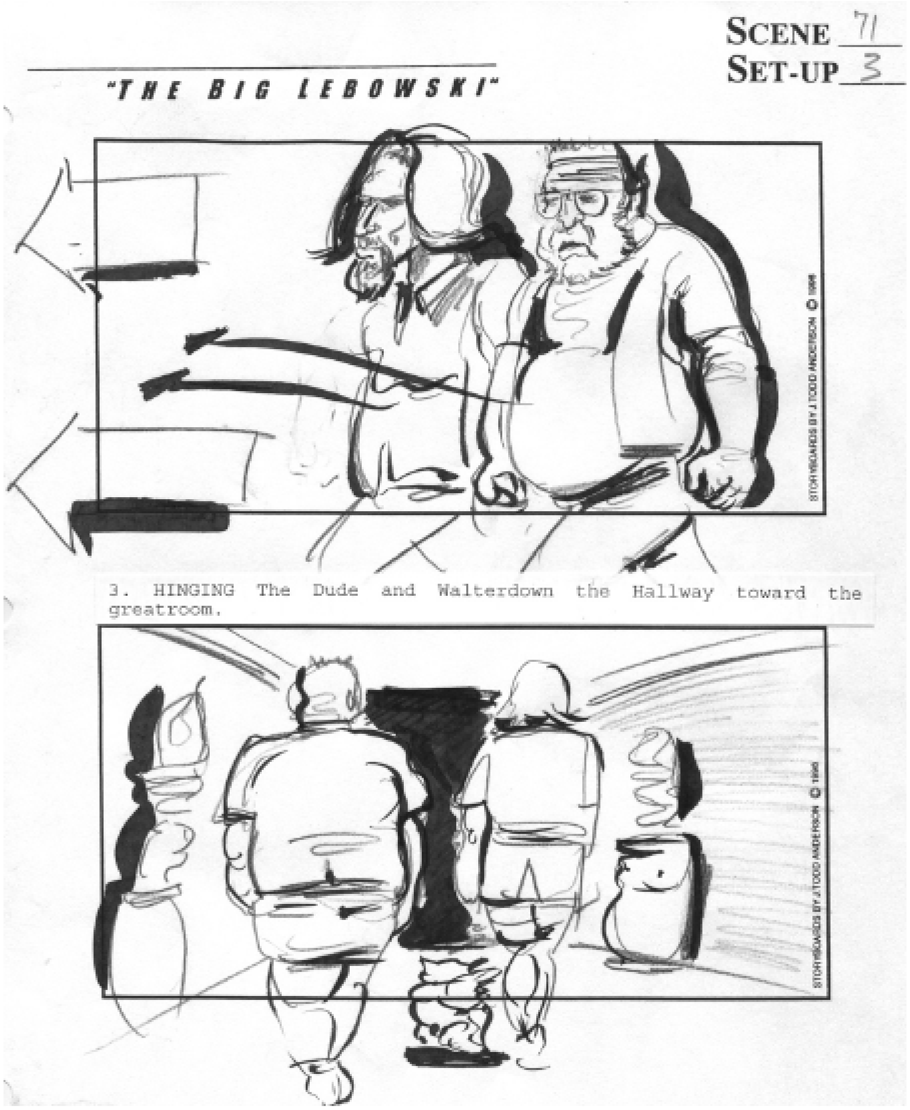
SCENE 71
SET-UP 1

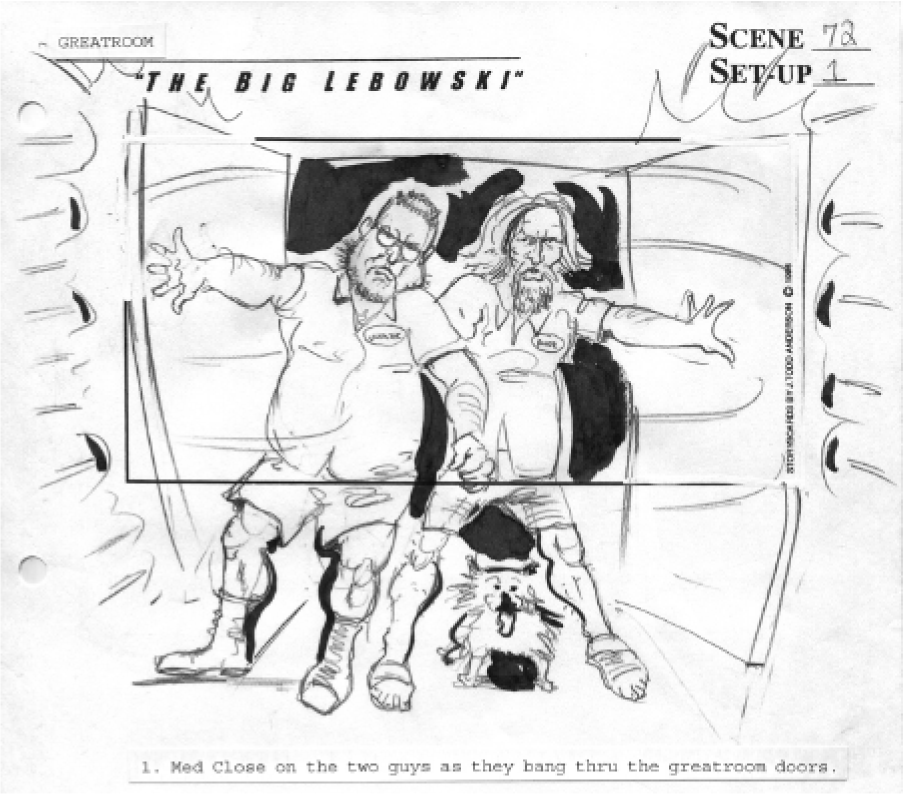
"THE BIG LEBOWSKI"


STORYBOARDS BY J. TODD ANDERSON © 1996

1. WIDE 2-shot PULLING DUDE and WALTER down the staircase.


"THE BIG LEBOWSKI"
SCENE 71
SET-UP 3
STORYBOARDS BY J TODD ANDERSON
3. HINGING The Dude and Walterdown the Hallway toward the greatroom.
STORYBOARDS BY J TODD ANDERSON

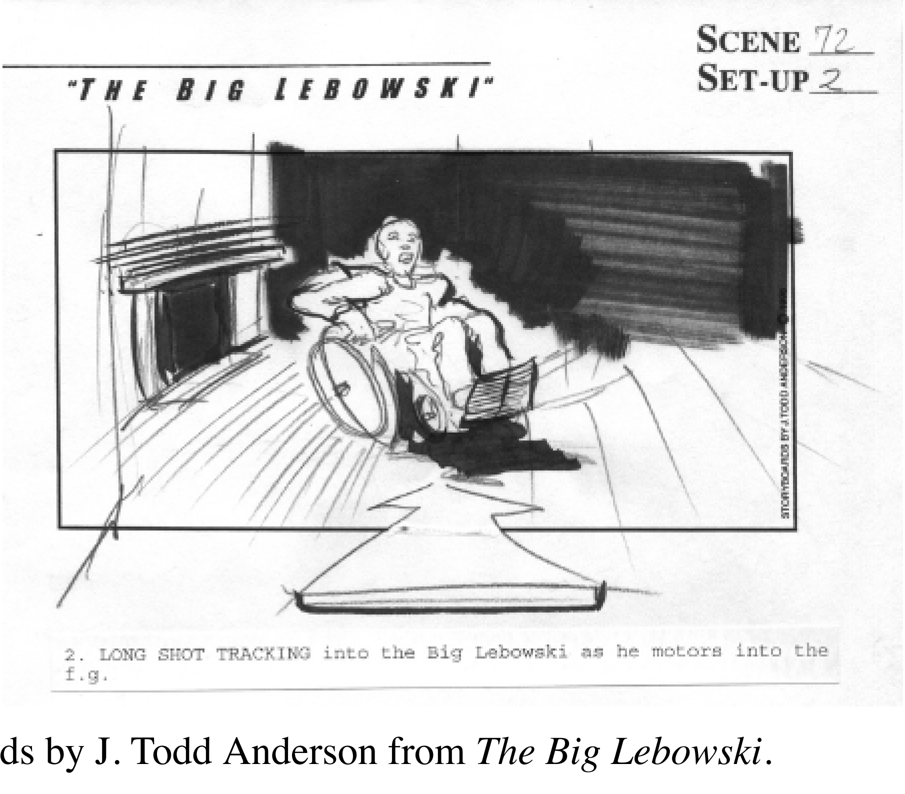
Storyboards by J. Todd Anderson from *The Big Lebowski*.



GREATROOM
"THE BIG LEBOWSKI"
STORYBOARDS BY J TODD ANDERSON ©

SCENE 72
SET-UP 1

1. Med Close on the two guys as they bang thru the greatroom doors.



"THE BIG LEBOWSKI"
STORYBOARDS BY J TODD ANDERSON ©

SCENE 72
SET-UP 2

2. LONG SHOT TRACKING into the Big Lebowski as he motors into the f.g.

Storyboards by J. Todd Anderson from *The Big Lebowski*.

The common phrase is that there are selectors and directors. A *selector* must be shown every element in the picture multiple times and does not have clear or consistent recommendations, while a *director* has a clear compass heading and the ability to explain his decisions from an informed point of view. Part of the goal of this book is to help directors develop a visual design process so they don't waste the limited resources and time all movies face.

Skills Required by Storyboard Artists

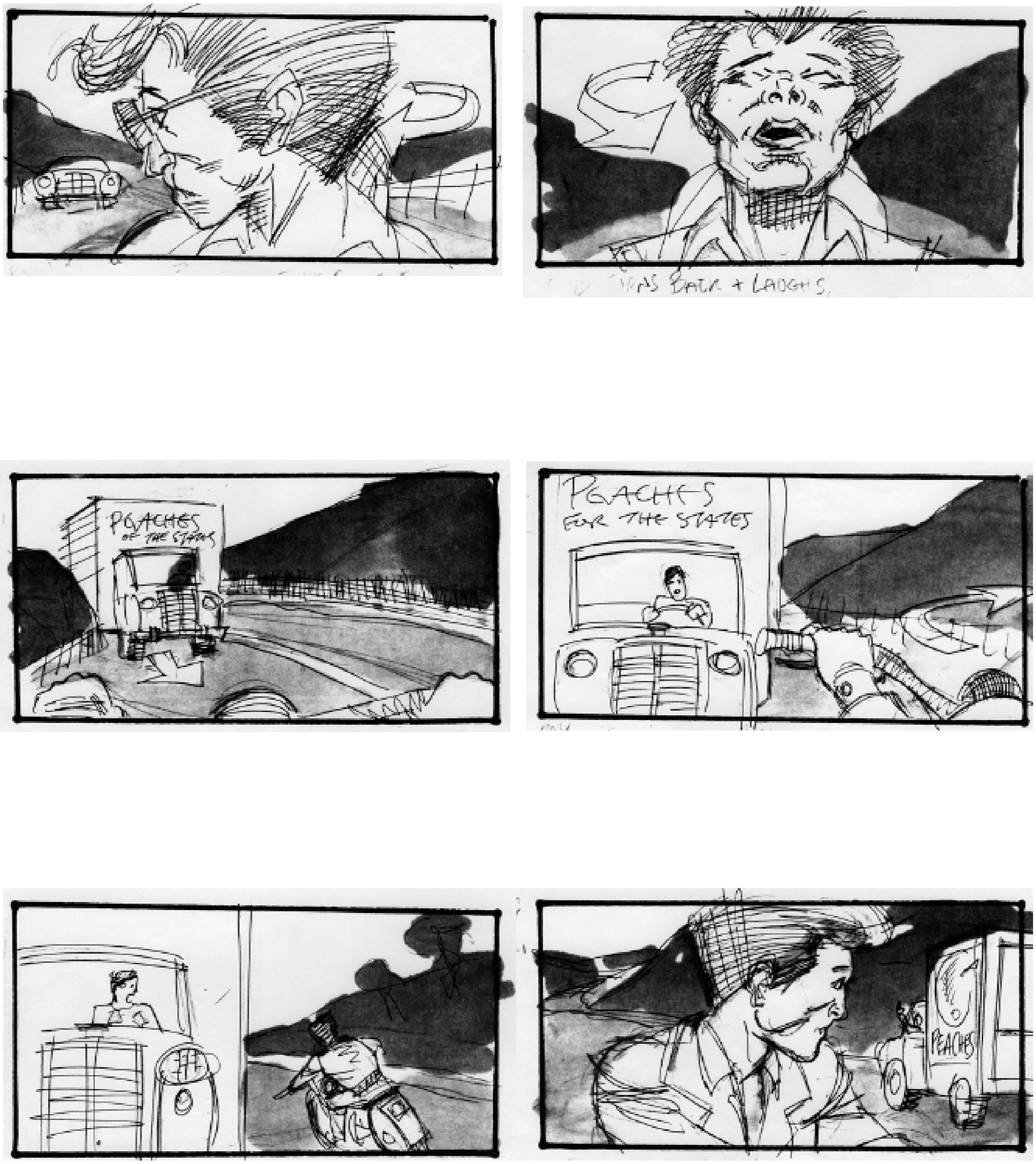
A production illustrator must understand staging, editing, and composition, and be thoroughly familiar with the use of lenses in cinematography. He or she should be a facile draftsman adept at drawing the human figure in a variety of poses without resorting to models or photographs. He also needs to be able to work quickly under the pressure of deadlines and to adapt to the look and feel of different historical periods and exotic locations. This doesn't mean research material isn't used. A sketch artist isn't expected to know period clothing or what the interior of a German submarine or the skyline of Nepal looks like. But a good visual memory is invaluable since he will have limited time to find references for any series of sketches.

Reference and Research

In the later stages of design, the sketch artist will base his illustrations on photographs of the actual locations chosen by the director, production designer, and cinematographer, or he may visit the location in person and photograph his own reference shots. In the case of the film *La Bamba*, the biography of rock and roll musician Ritchie Valens, storyboarder Paul Power immersed himself in Mexican culture, visiting the locations where Valens actually lived and meeting with members of his family. Power worked on the boards for several months before shooting and stayed with the production during actual shooting to adjust the boards as filming progressed. An excerpt from Paul Power's opening storyboard for *La Bamba* begins on page 27.

For a relatively low-budget film, Power's experience on *La Bamba* was enviable. In general, the storyboard illustrators in today's moviemaking environment have less time to refine their boards than in the past. Perversely, this excellent tool, which can save producers a great deal of time and money, is one of the first items in the budget to be reduced or eliminated.

Today the liberal use of storyboards and elaborate concept art is a consequence of domination of superhero and visual effects–heavy pictures costing over $150 million. With most of these pictures based on graphic novels or comic books, it’s no wonder that we are in a production art renaissance. Concept artists Craig Mullins and Doug Chiang are the first wave of an explosion of digital artists with thousands of other illustrators’ portfolios online. Many of them are avid photographers and have 3D skills as well as experience using traditional art materials.


TURNS BACK + LAUGHS,
PEACHES OF THE STATES
PEACHES FOR THE STATES
PEACHES

Storyboards for *La Bamba* by Paul Power

Style

Beginning on page 29 are five storyboards from *Citizen Kane*. These are good examples of how continuity sketches can convey the visual flow and mood of a sequence and are typical of the type of work produced at the studios in the ’30s and ’40s. Credit is given at the bottom of one of the drawings to director Orson Welles, art director Van Nest Polglase, and his associate Perry Ferguson. This is somewhat misleading and one of the many unattractive aspects of the studio system. In actuality, Ferguson was the art director on *Citizen Kane*, and Polglase was head of the entire RKO art department. Ferguson did the actual design work for *Citizen Kane* while Polglase's responsibility was largely managerial; he was not involved in most of the specific creative decisions. Unfortunately, under the studio system, production illustrators were not allowed to sign their work, making it difficult today to assign credit to individual drawings.

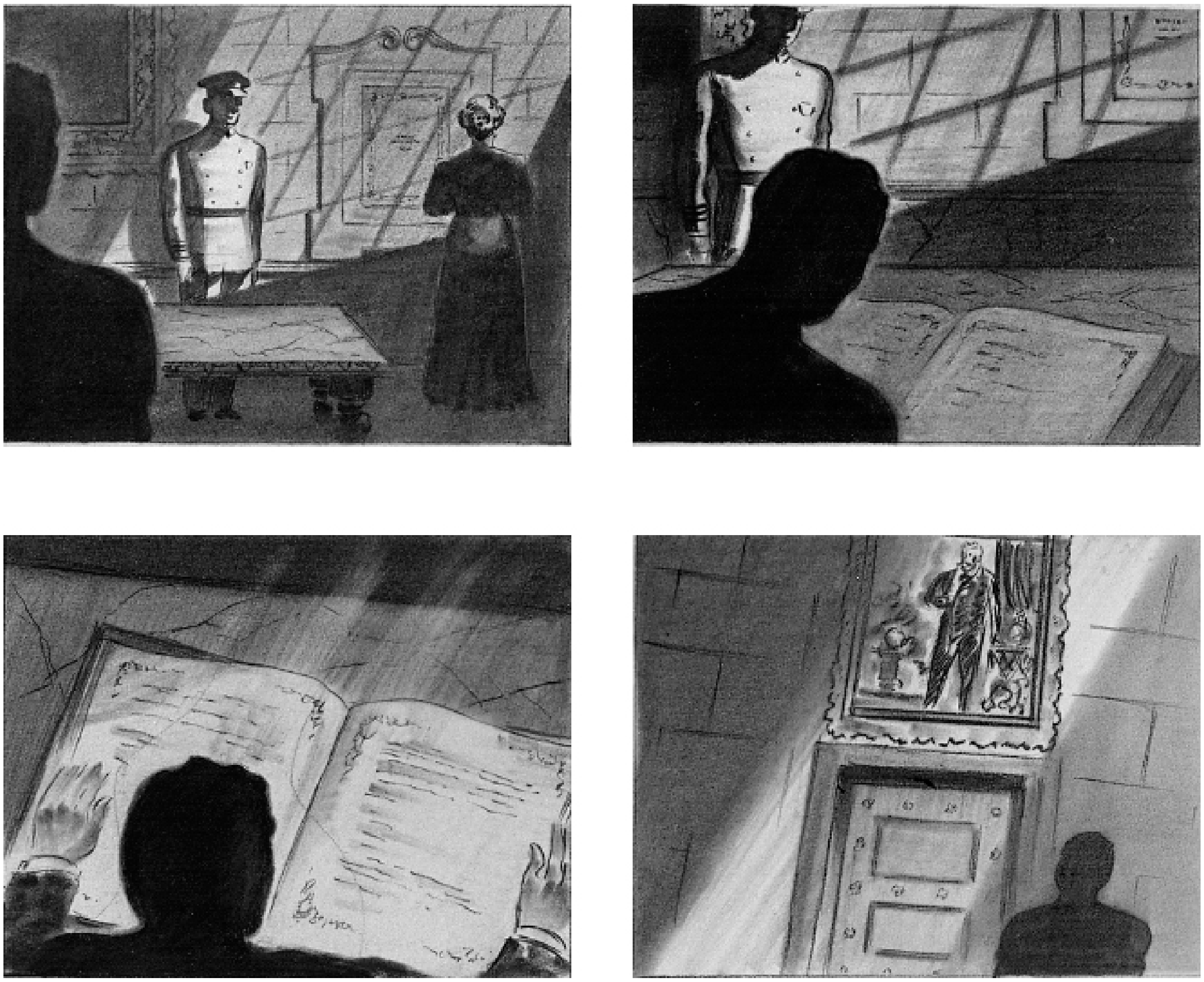
Ferguson worked in close collaboration with Welles on the conception of the scenes, which was then turned into sketches, set drawings, and storyboards by illustrators in the RKO art department. According to credits listed in *The Making of Citizen Kane* by Robert C. Carringer, there were five illustrators on *Kane*: Charles Ohmann is listed as "Principal Sketch Artist," while Al Abbott, Claude Gillingwater, Jr., Albert Pyke, and Maurice Zuberano are listed under the heading "Sketches and Graphics." There may have been other artists who contributed sketches, and oftentimes more than one artist would work on a drawing or storyboard. In the studio system, it was not unusual for illustrators in the art department to work on projects they were not assigned to when the work needed to be done.

The first storyboard on page 29 is a four-panel sequence of the Thatcher Library. These charcoal sketches are a better example of set design and mood than of editing continuity, and the gothic lighting is very close to the way the scene appeared in the film.

The second sequence pictured is a more conventional continuity board and shows a scene deleted from the script. The sequence is a recollection by Kane's guardian, financier Walter Thatcher, of a trip to Rome to see Kane on his twenty-fifth birthday. Descriptions below each panel describe the basic action of the scene, transitions, and camera movement.

In the next series, Kane meets Susan Alexander for the first time outside a drugstore. The basic action of the scene is quite close to the filmed version, but the camera angles and staging are very different.

The last storyboard is one of the most famous shots in *Citizen Kane*: the crane moves through the skylight of the El Rancho cabaret down to Susan Alexander and Kane seated at a table. In the movie, the shot is a combination of a miniature rooftop set and the full-scale studio interior of the nightclub joined by a dissolve as the camera moves through the rain-covered glass of the skylight to create the illusion of a single continuous shot.

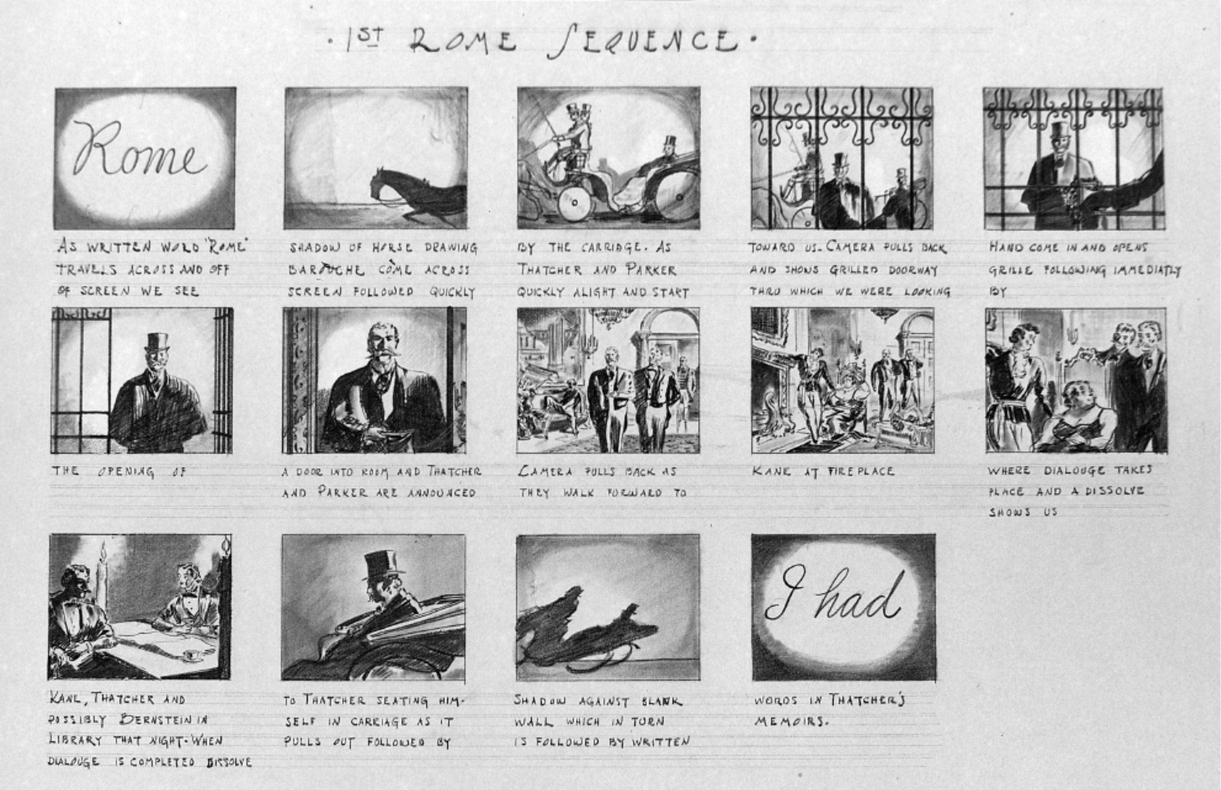


Storyboard for The Thatcher Library scene in *Citizen Kane*

The treatment of the crane shot on page 32 is wonderfully rendered in a style of illustration evoking the lighting of the German Expressionists of the ’20s, though the framing of the scene is quite different from the way the sequence eventually turned out. Other storyboards from the same collection held in the archives at the University of Illinois at Urbana show other versions of the same shot.

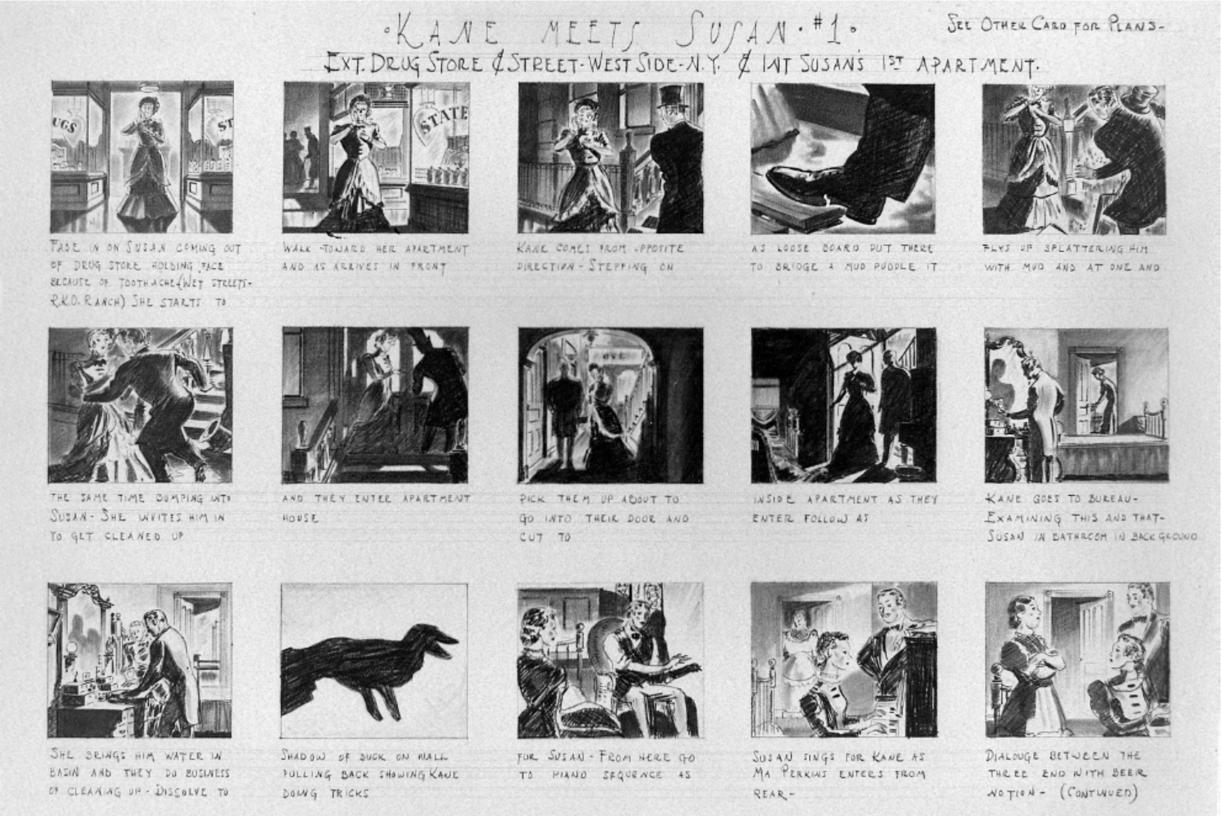
Similarly moody are Harold Michelson's storyboards for Hitchcock's *The Birds*. The six panels featured show how the economical use of line can convey all the information the cinematographer needs to understand the framing continuity of a scene. Without spending a great deal of time on specific detail, these energetic sketches establish mood, locale, composition, staging of action, and the selection of lens for each shot. The six frames on pages 35 and 36 depict the attack of the birds on the children running from the schoolhouse in Bodega Bay after the birds have gathered in force.

The production designer for *The Birds*, Robert Boyle, collaborated with Hitchcock on five films beginning in 1942: *Saboteur, Shadow of a Doubt, North by Northwest, The Birds*, and *Marnie*. He reaffirms Hitchcock's reputation as a methodical planner, but also as a director who was interested in the ideas of the talented people with whom he worked. Their usual way of working together began with meetings early in the production schedule to go over each scene. Hitchcock might furnish rough thumbnail sketches to elaborate a sequence, but this process was also intended to allow his creative team to elaborate on each other's ideas. From these meetings a general plan was devised for each scene, some more detailed than others, and Boyle would begin to oversee the storyboards, set designs, costumes, and special effects necessary to turn ideas into cinematic fact. Boyle would contribute some of his own drawings for the sets and storyboards, but much of this work was handed over to storyboard illustrators who would receive instructions based on Boyle and Hitchcock's meetings.



·1ST ROME SEQUENCE·
Rome
AS WRITTEN WORD 'ROME' TRAVELS ACROSS AND OFF OF SCREEN WE SEE
SHADOW OF HORSE DRAWING BAROUCHE COME ACROSS SCREEN FOLLOWED QUICKLY
BY THE CARRIAGE. AS THATCHER AND PARKER QUICKLY ALIGHT AND START
TOWARD US. CAMERA PULLS BACK AND SHOWS GRILLED DOORWAY THRU WHICH WE WERE LOOKING
HAND COME IN AND OPENS GRILLE FOLLOWING IMMEDIATLY BY
THE OPENING OF
A DOOR INTO ROOM AND THATCHER AND PARKER ARE ANNOUNCED
CAMERA PULLS BACK AS THEY WALK FORWARD TO
KANE AT FIREPLACE
WHERE DIALOUGE TAKES PLACE AND A DISSOLVE SHOWS US
KANE, THATCHER AND POSSIBLY BERNSTEIN IN LIBRARY THAT NIGHT. WHEN DIALOUGE IS COMPLETED DISSOLVE
TO THATCHER SEATING HIMSELF IN CARRIAGE AS IT PULLS OUT FOLLOWED BY
SHADOW AGAINST BLANK WALL WHICH IN TURN IS FOLLOWED BY WRITTEN
I had
WORDS IN THATCHER'S MEMOIRS.

Storyboards from *Citizen Kane*. This Page: Rome sequence deleted from *Citizen Kane*. Next page: Kane meets Susan Alexander.



·KANE MEETS SUSAN·#1·

SEE OTHER CARD FOR PLANS-

EXT. DRUG STORE & STREET-WEST SIDE-N.Y. & INT SUSAN'S 1ST APARTMENT.

FADE IN ON SUSAN COMING OUT OF DRUG STORE HOLDING FACE BECAUSE OF TOOTHACHE (WET STREETS-R.K.O. RANCH) SHE STARTS TO

WALK TOWARD HER APARTMENT AND AS ARRIVES IN FRONT

KANE COMES FROM OPPOSITE DIRECTION-STEPPING ON

AS LOOSE BOARD PUT THERE TO BRIDGE A MUD PUDDLE IT

FLYS UP SPLATTERING HIM WITH MUD AND AT ONE AND

THE SAME TIME DUMPING INTO SUSAN-SHE INVITES HIM IN TO GET CLEANED UP

AND THEY ENTER APARTMENT HOUSE

PICK THEM UP ABOUT TO GO INTO THEIR DOOR AND CUT TO

INSIDE APARTMENT AS THEY ENTER FOLLOW AS

KANE GOES TO BUREAU-EXAMINING THIS AND THAT-SUSAN IN BATHROOM IN BACKGROUND

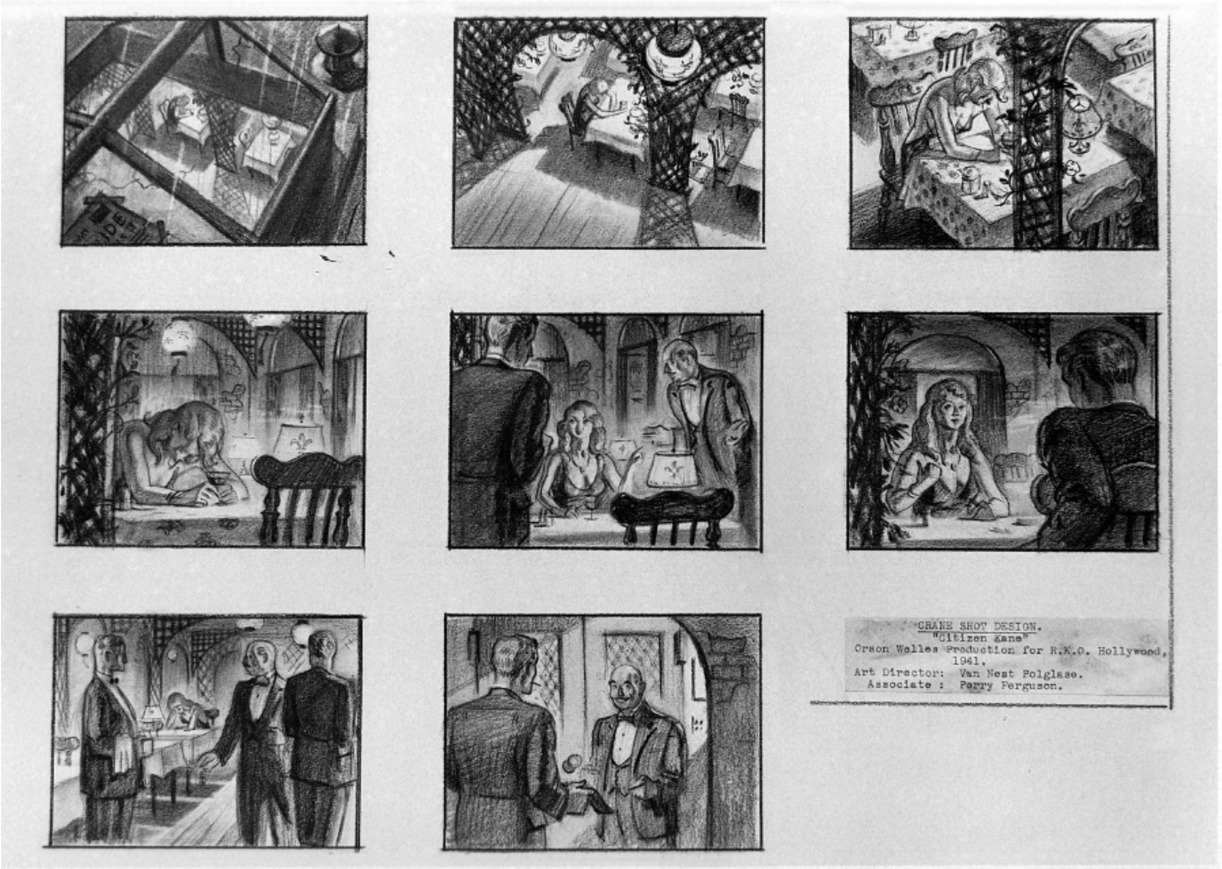
SHE BRINGS HIM WATER IN BASIN AND THEY DO BUSINESS OF CLEANING UP-DISSOLVE TO

SHADOW OF DUCK ON WALL PULLING BACK SHOWING KANE DOING TRICKS

FOR SUSAN-FROM HERE GO TO PIANO SEQUENCE AS

SUSAN SINGS FOR KANE AS MA PERKINS ENTERS FROM REAR-

DIALOUGE BETWEEN THE THREE END WITH BEER NOTION- (CONTINUED)


CRANE SHOT DESIGN.
"Citizen Kane"
Orson Welles Production for R.K.O. Hollywood,
1941.
Art Director: Van Nest Polglase.
Associate : Perry Ferguson.

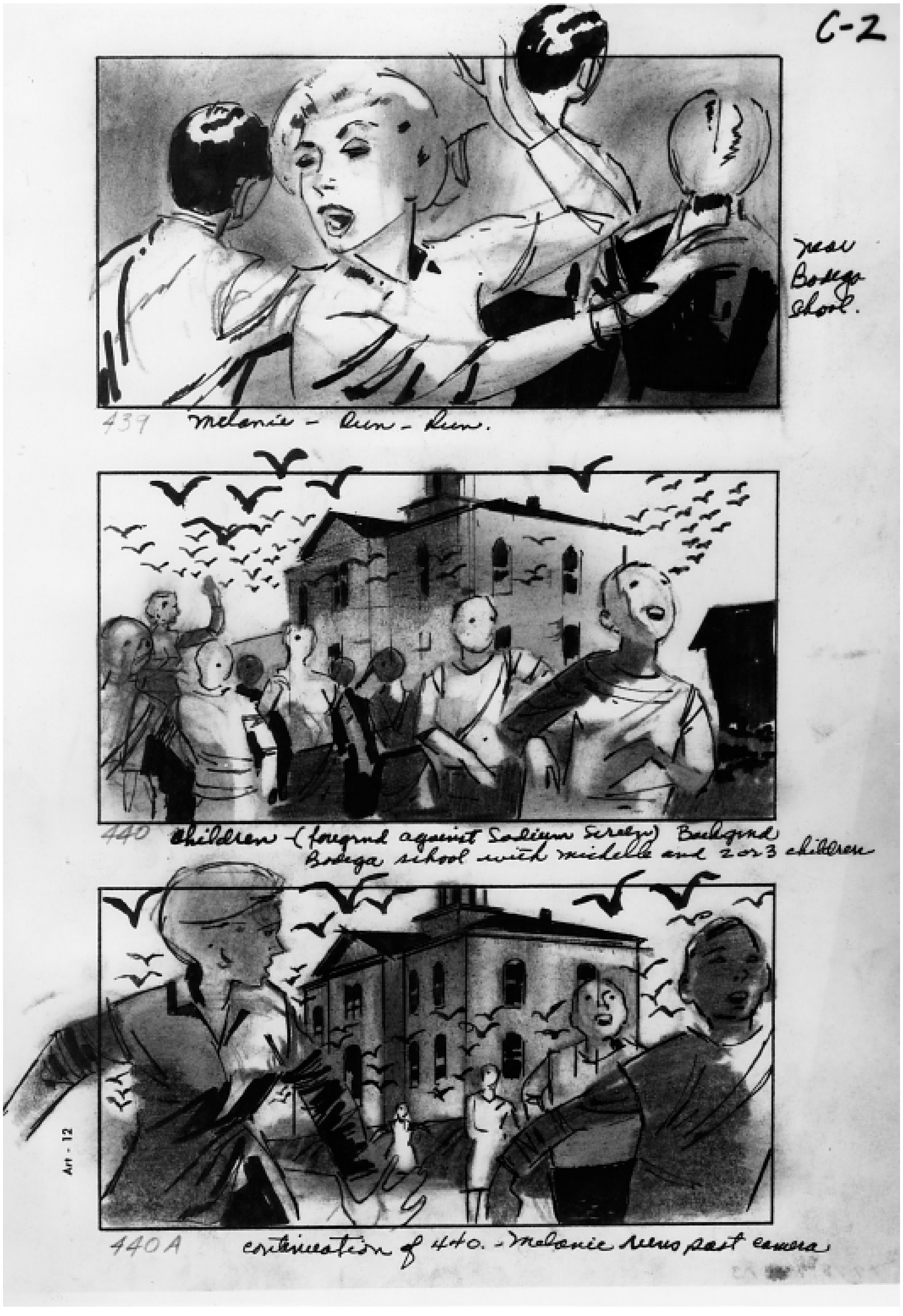
Storyboard of the El Rancho cabaret crane shot from *Citizen Kane*.

Following Michelson's drawings on page 36 is an extremely rare page of notes and storyboard panels drawn by Hitchcock himself for the 1943 production of *Lifeboat*. The page is three-hole punched for use in a binder and includes notes describing action and the lines of dialogue that accompany the panels. The specific dialogue cues mean that Hitchcock was cutting in the camera, greatly limiting the manipulation possible during the editing process by the studio. The first panel shows that Hitchcock made a slight adjustment in the composition, moving closer and to camera left. Notice also that the direction "Repeat all with closer lens" appears on the far left of the second panel. This may refer to the dotted frame line around the oarsman, indicating that Hitchcock intended to get coverage of the same action, only closer.

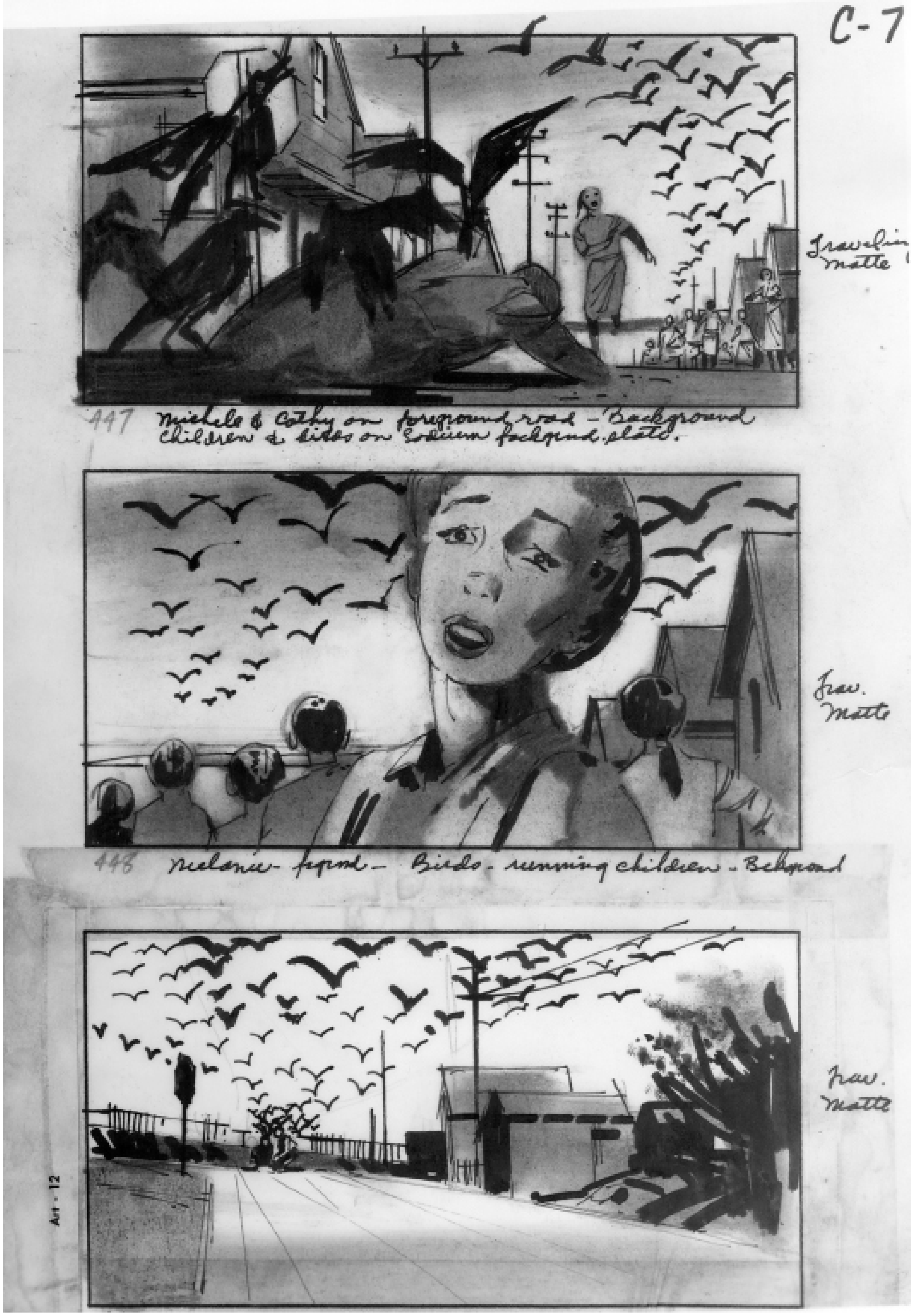
Digital Storyboards

Today, the typical storyboard artist is parked in front of a two 27-inch monitors and drawing on a Wacom tablet. Probably a Cintiq. He researches and downloads hundreds of images from the Internet using parts of images or entire images in compositions painted in Photoshop. He’s an above average Maya user and downloads 3D models from TurboSquid or Renderosity all the time. It all ends up as layers in Photoshop and this has influenced his illustration style. The storyboarder routinely combines photography, 3D models, and painted elements in Photoshop. It’s just a matter of changing software.

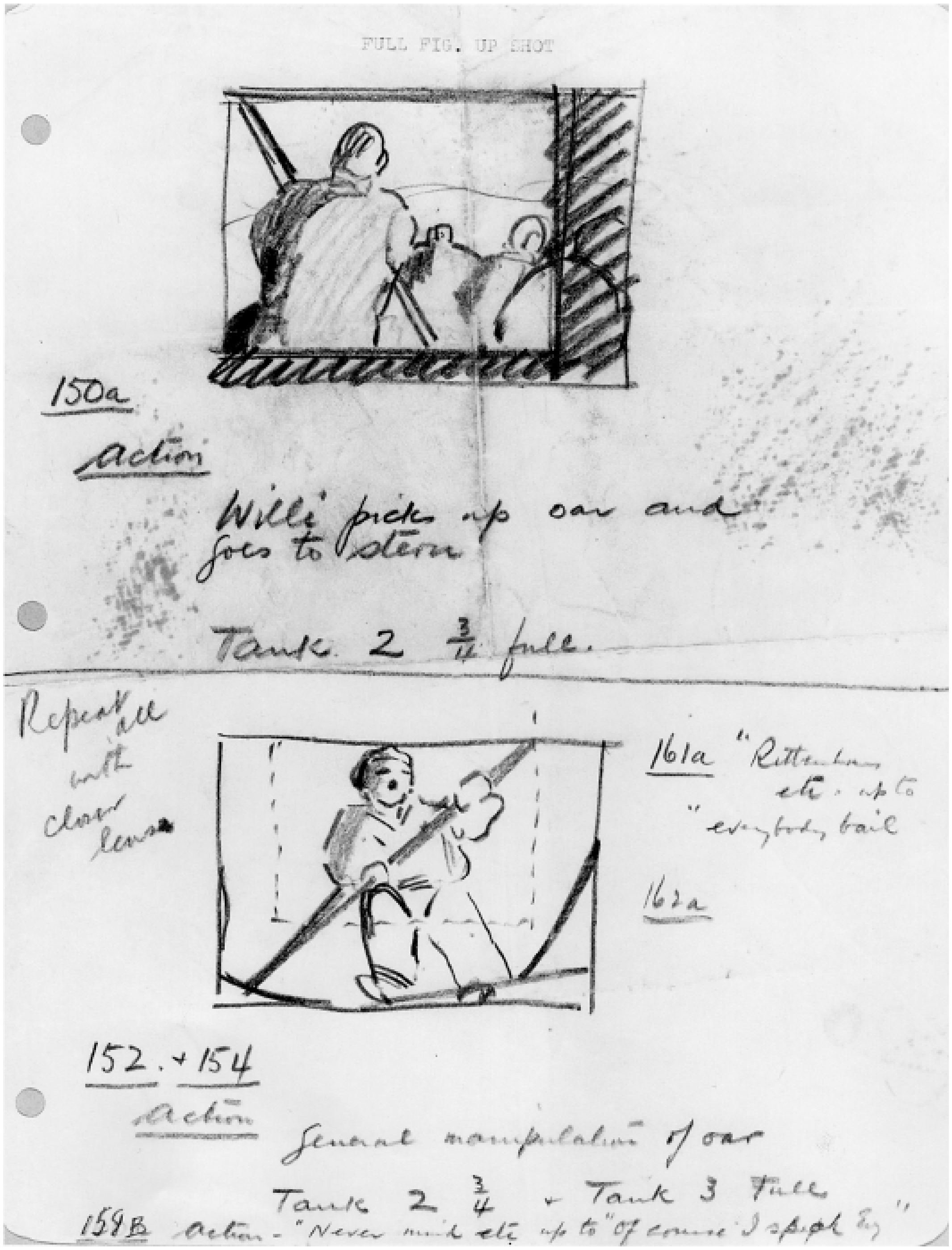
Most of the storyboard artists working in studio pictures are accustomed to making a slideshow in PowerPoint or in a QuickTime movie, adding visual and sound effects in Adobe After Effects. Adding sound and limited effects to an edited storyboard greatly enhances the presentation. Entire libraries of images, sounds, and premade effects presets are for sale online, making the process substantially easier. The iPad and its various competitors are a great way to present an enhanced storyboard sequence and because it’s backlit, the colors are more vibrant than any printed image.


C-2
near Bodega School.
439 Melanie - Run - Run.
440 Children - (foregrnd against Sodium Screen) Backgrnd Bodega school with Michelle and 2 or 3 children
Art - 12
440A continuation of 440. - Melanie runs past camera

Storyboards for *The Birds* by Harold Michelson. Production design by Robert Boyle.


C-7
Traveling matte
447 Michele & Cathy on foreground road - Background children & birds on Eastern backgrnd. plate.
Trav. matte
448 Melanie - fgrnd - Birds - running children - Bckgrnd
Trav. matte
Art - 12

Storyboards for *The Birds* by Harold Michelson. Production design by Robert Boyle.



FULL FIG. UP SHOT

150a

action

Willi picks up oar and goes to stern

Tank $2\frac{3}{4}$ full.

Repeat all with close lens

161a "Rittenhouse etc. up to "everybody bail

162a

152. + 154

action

General manipulation of oar

Tank $2\frac{3}{4}$ + Tank 3 Full

159B action – "Never mind etc up to "Of course I speak Eng"

Notes and storyboard panels for *Lifeboat* by Alfred Hitchcock.

Illustrating Camera Techniques

The most obvious limitation of the storyboard is its inability to show motion — not merely action within the frame, but more importantly, the movement of the camera. Optical effects like dissolves and fades are also beyond the scope of the pencil, as are most manipulations of depth of field and focus. However, if you're drawing digitally, you have the ability to blur all or parts of an image to simulate depth of field. The most obvious solution to helping show motion with a static storyboard frame is to use arrows, captions, and schematic drawings in the margins. A schematic would be a top view of the set and the camera and the angle of view (what the camera sees). There are also several techniques used by animators to show camera movement and extended space that can be adapted to live-action subjects.

The border of the storyboard frame outlines the camera viewpoint. However, sometimes it's helpful to see the context of a shot by including what's outside the frame. In fact, many artists begin a drawing without frame lines at all. After they have sketched in the basic elements of the scene, they look for the best shot within the drawing and that's when they select the size and placement of the box around the action. Some storyboard artists have several cardboard panels with different size frames cut out that they move over a drawing to select a shot. In the digital realm, of course, the frame can sit on a separate drawing layer in Photoshop and most other paint programs. While it's hard to beat the power of the computer to revise and control illustration the feeling of pencil on paper has not been duplicated with an input device yet.

In this next series of panels, we'll use different drawing styles while showing several methods of illustrating camera movement and transitions.

The Pan Shot and the Tracking Shot

This first wide panel in Figure 3.1 illustrates a man running down a street in pursuit of a rooftop sniper. The man in the street is shown at important positions in the action with an arrow indicating his path. This type of panel can be used to indicate a pan or a tracking shot. In this version, specific framing is not indicated; however, the camera position and staging of the action is quite clear.

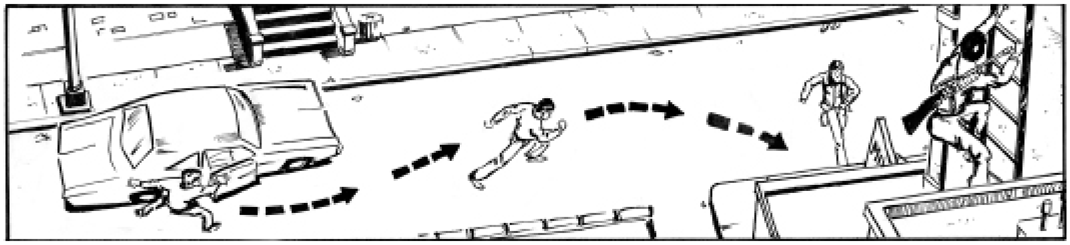


Figure 3.1

It is possible to show actual framing, as in this next example of a car chase in Figure 3.2. A frame within the frame indicates the composition of the shot as the camera will see the action. In this case, left-hand frame (A) camera zooms down to the size of the smaller right-hand frame as the car moves right to left. There is no standardization in any of this iconography; you can pretty much design things the way you want as long as you get the idea across.

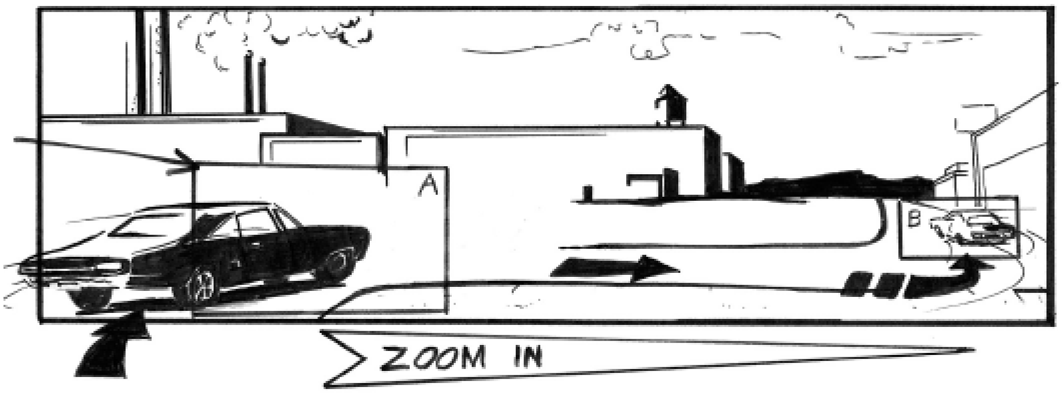


Figure 3.2: A storyboard pan shot

The third panoramic storyboard in Figure 3.3 is a vertical pan and shows how a multiperspective view can indicate panning over a large expanse. The diver is seen first in an up shot and followed until the camera is tilted down to the pool.

Dolly and Zoom Shots

In animation, it's common practice to draw a large panel and then frame smaller portions of the whole picture to obtain medium shots, close-ups (CUs), and extreme close-ups. This is called a field cut in animation and is used to get the maximum number of shots from a single piece of artwork by photographing it in several frame sizes. A field cut is indicated as a frame within a frame, and the iconography is also used for live-action storyboards to indicate a dolly or zoom as shown in Figure 3.4. To indicate the direction of the dolly or zoom (in or out), arrows are added connecting the two squares. This shows that the change in shot size is obtained through movement rather than cutting.

A more conventional way of indicating an on-axis cut, dolly, or zoom shot is shown in Figure 3.5. The problem, of course, is that the figure has to be drawn twice and requires additional explanation with captions. The advantage of the additional frame is that the impact of the CU is conveyed more effectively.

The frame within a frame can also be used to show erratic camera motion as in Figure 3.6.

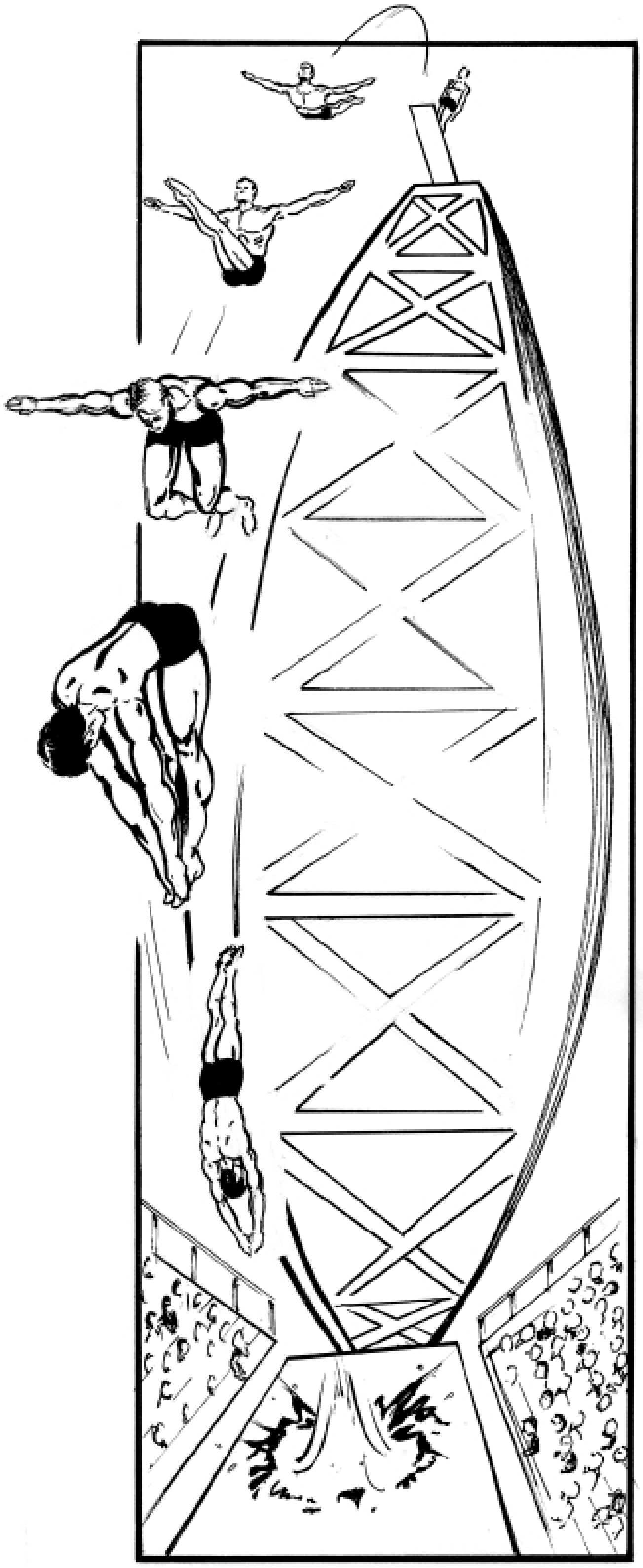


Figure 3.3: Multiperspective views like this one are a good way to show a pan shot that pivots over a great distance. With this type of illustration, it is hard to tell if the framing of the shot is a wide, medium, or close-up shot. However, the alternative type of representation, which uses several individual frames of the diver's action, would not convey the main characteristic of the shot — smooth motion and the path of the diver.

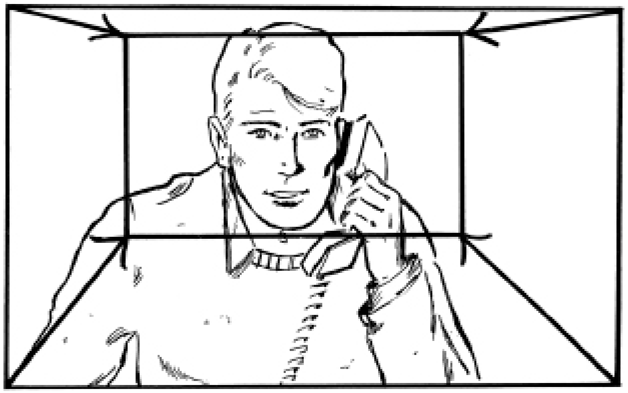


Figure 3.4: The drawing on the Left uses a frame within a frame to indicate a zoom or dolly move. If the Lines connecting the inner frame to the corners of the outer frame were removed this would mean that a change in shot size is accomplished with a cut to a new shot.

Transitions Between Shots

In the next few panels (Figure 3.7), we'll see how transitions like dissolves and fades can be handled. This particular type of layout is borrowed from animation storyboards. Styles vary slightly depending on the animation studio, but Figure 3.7 shows a typical use of the space between panels.

The Crane Shot

This last example of continuity and editing illustration techniques (Figure 3.8) is a full sequence shot using a crane move. Though there are 11 panels in the storyboard, it represents a single, unbroken shot.

Format and Presentation

With affordable inkjet printers and the ability to have a password-protected site to show artwork and video/sound at motion-picture resolution, there are many ways to present and share production artwork. Nowadays, the majority of work is shared online and most presentations I've seen in the past year were presented on laptop screens. When many illustrations are printed and presented on paper, it's most likely for presentations to investors, distributors, or studio heads.

During preproduction, storyboards are usually shared across many departments. The format of the presentation depends on how they'll be used. In animation, the storyboards are typically placed on a wall or bulletin board in the art department, following Disney's example, so that a great many panels can be seen in group meetings. This makes sense for getting a logistical overview of shooting requirements but is inconvenient for visualizing precise shot-to-shot flow and timing. In the early stages of storyboarding, the director is likely to do beat boards to quickly sketch out the entire movie. The storyboard team makes small very loose sketches with one sketch standing in for a minute of screen time. The moments chosen for representation are the major story beats. The boards are typically tacked to a wall or several walls. After a few weeks and a lot of revisions, an entire 90-minute animated movie might be worked out in a few hundred pencil sketches. A few more weeks might be spent revising areas of weakness and generally refining the most important dramatic moments and turning points. Dozens of beat boards might be eliminated or added at weekly storyboard meetings so the walls of beat drawings show where many of the most important decisions are made. Typically, the editor is cutting the beat panels into sequences and sequences into acts cutting to a scratch track until a 90-minute beat movie is ready. Now begins the months of storyboarding each scene with many, many more storyboard panels per minute of screen time. Storyboard artists and the editor will collaborate with the Head of Story to have the art prepared in such a way that the editor or After Effects artist will add limited animation to the drawings. After a year of storyboarding with increasing refinement and detail, including the inclusion of actual rough animation and 3D previs, an audience can watch this finalized animation looking past the imperfections and responding to the story. In animation, getting a previs version of the movie in front of an audience is the magnetic north of storyboarding.

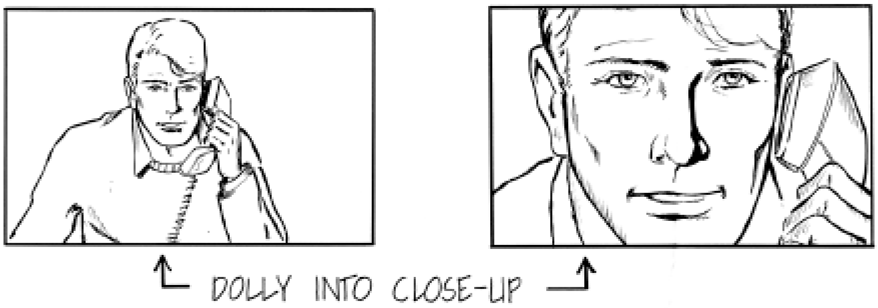


Figure 3.5: This is a typical method of indicating a change in shot size.

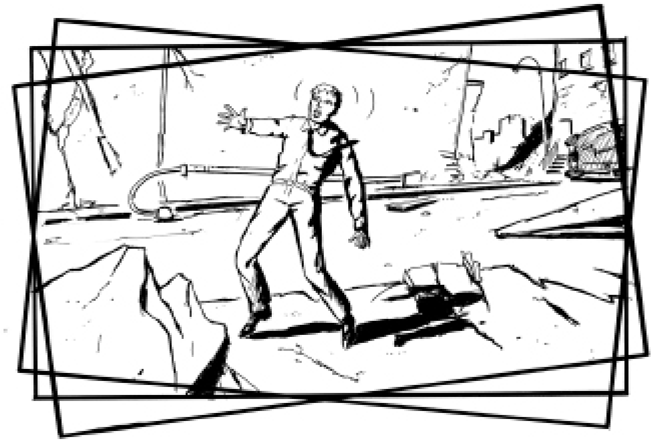


Figure 3.6: Camera movement used to simulate the movement of the ground, the pitching deck of a ship, or any other movement of subject or space can be shown using a frame within a frame.

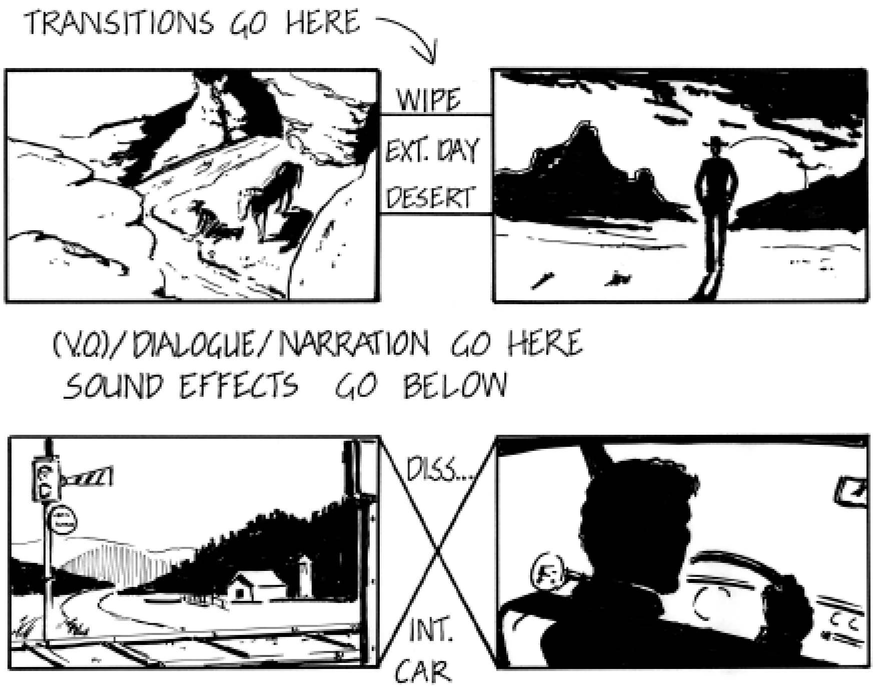
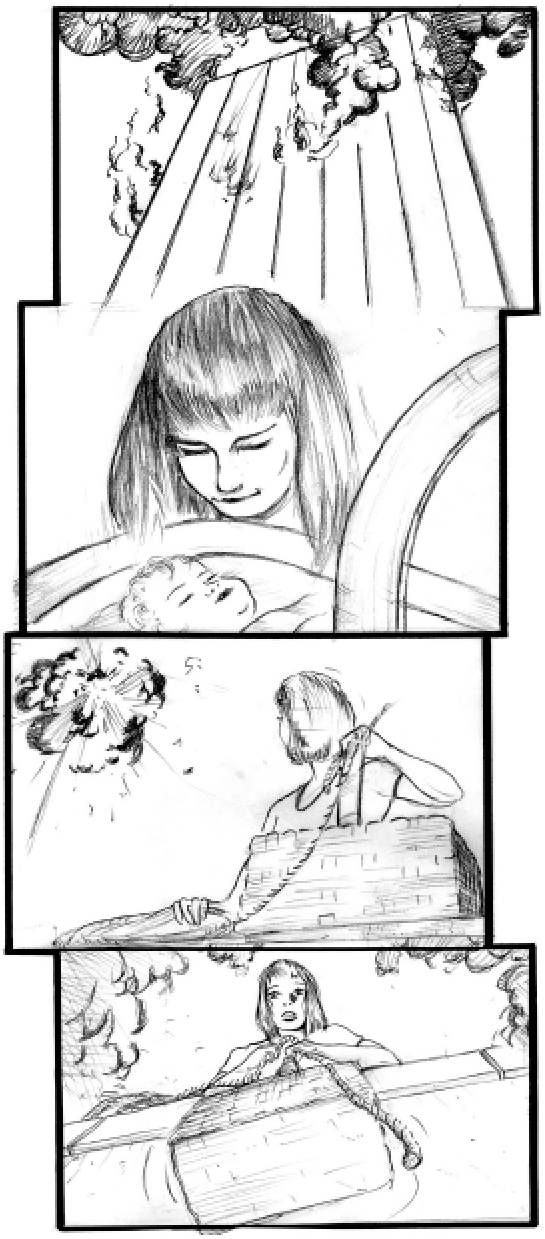

TRANSITIONS GO HERE
WIPE
EXT. DAY
DESERT
(V.O)/DIALOGUE/NARRATION GO HERE
SOUND EFFECTS GO BELOW
DISS...
INT.
CAR

Figure 3.7: Animators use the space between frames to show transitions between shots.



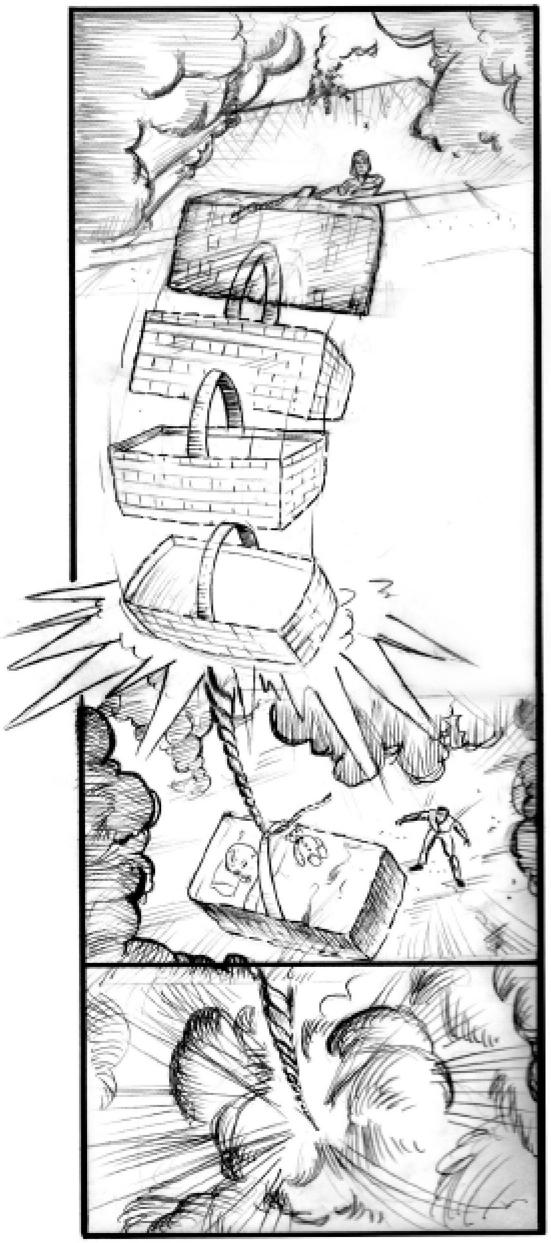
APT. BUILDING IS IN FLAMES— PAN DOWN WITH FALLING DEBRIS TO ——

—WOMAN AND BABY IN EXTREME F.G. ON APT. TERRACE ON FOURTH FLOOR. IN B.G. FLAMES EXLPLODE FROM W WINDOW.

CAMERA PULLS BACK TO REVEAL WOMAN ABOUT TO LOWER BABY IN BASKET TO THE GROUND.

CAMERA BEGINS TO CRANE DOWN BELOW BASKET AS IT DESENDS.

Figure 3.8: The first of three panels illustrating a continuous crane shot.



CAMERA CONTINUES TO MOVE DOWN
BELOW BASKET UNTIL WOMEN IS FAR
AWAY IN B.G.

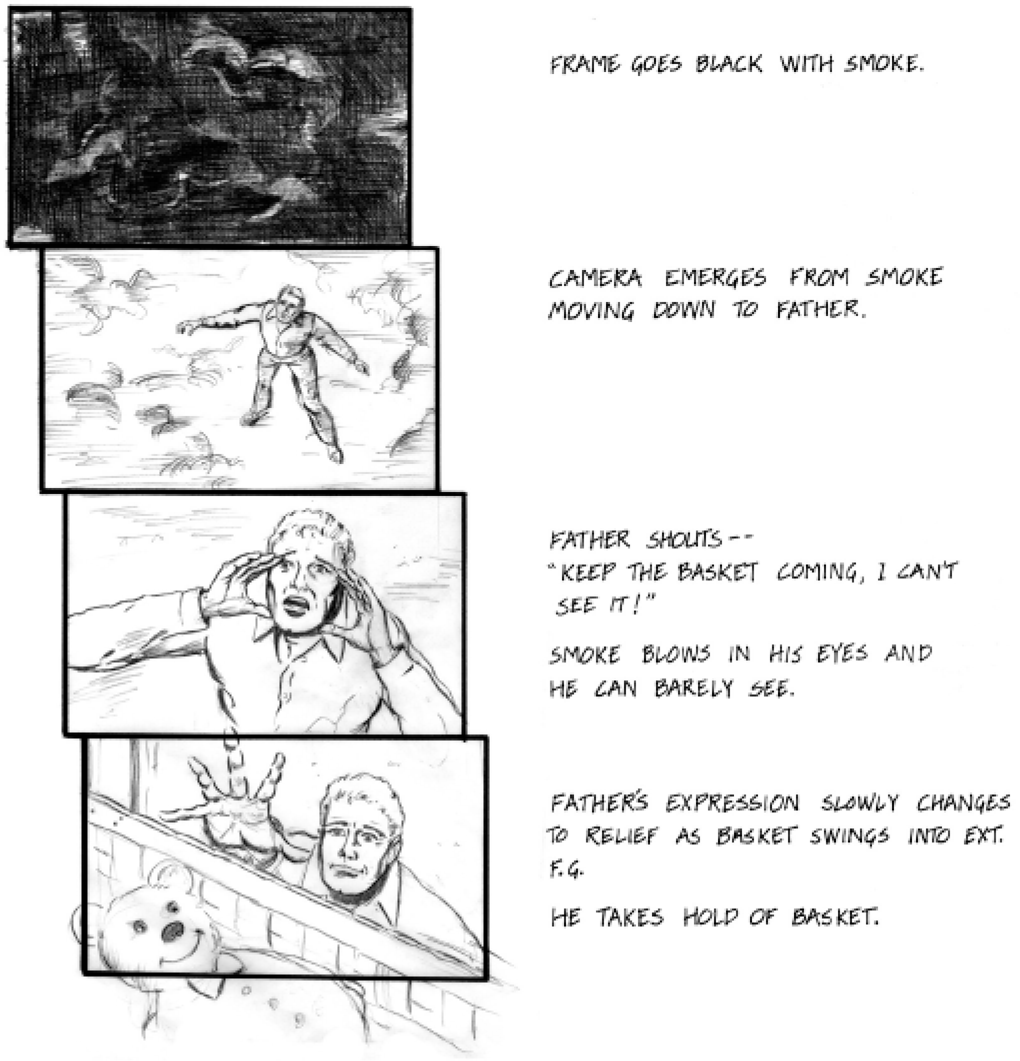
BASKET DROPS FASTER GAINING ON
CAMERA. BASKET PASSES CAMERA.

CAMERA PANS WITH BASKET INTO
DOWN SHOT.

FATHER IS WAITING BELOW, WHEN
FLAMES AND SMOKE BURST FROM
WINDOW BELOW BASKET.

SMOKE ENVELOPS BASKET.

Figure 3.8: The second of three panels illustrating a continuous crane shot.



FRAME GOES BLACK WITH SMOKE.

CAMERA EMERGES FROM SMOKE MOVING DOWN TO FATHER.

FATHER SHOUTS --
"KEEP THE BASKET COMING, I CAN'T SEE IT!"

SMOKE BLOWS IN HIS EYES AND HE CAN BARELY SEE.

FATHER'S EXPRESSION SLOWLY CHANGES TO RELIEF AS BASKET SWINGS INTO EXT. F.G.

HE TAKES HOLD OF BASKET.

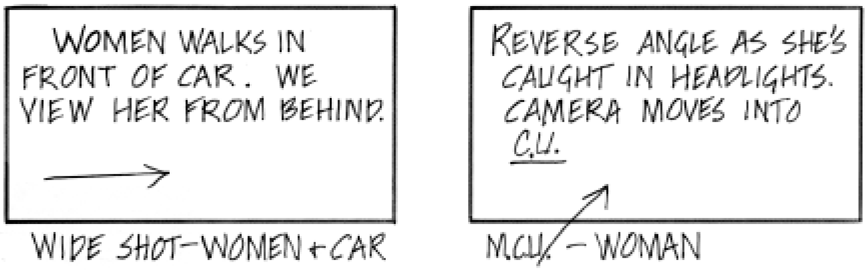
Figure 3.8: The third and final of three panels illustrating a continuous crane shot.

Simplified Storyboard Illustration

Storyboards basically convey two kinds of information: a description of the physical environment of the sequence (set design/location) and a description of the spatial quality of a sequence (staging, camera angle, lens, and the movement of any elements in the shot). While a storyboard illustrator is expected to convey mood, lighting, and other aspects of the environmental design, a director is only trying to show the basic setup of the camera and the placement of the subject. This can be conveyed with simple drawing styles or diagrams.

Shown next are several types of graphic representation that are fast and easily mastered. They can be combined in any way necessary to present the director's concept for a shot or scene. Our scene shows a woman running into the street and into the path of a car. In Figure 3.9, we begin with the most basic method of communication using written description and arrows to indicate screen direction of the subject of the shot or the movement of the camera. While this might seem so rudimentary as to be little help in designing a sequence, a director with editorial experience will be able to read the board and get a sense of the pacing.

Two types of schematic drawings are shown in Figure 3.10. First is an aerial plan that clearly shows the camera placement and the direction of action. The second pair of frames in Figure 3.10 are elevated schematics that show the height of the camera. Schematics are helpful in planning the order in which shots are photographed on the location, since many logistical problems are revealed. Usually this has to do with finding the best way to move equipment and people. An aerial schematic might show that if dolly track is laid for the last shot before lunch break, it blocks the path for cars that must be moved at that time. While schematics describe camera placement exactly, they give little indication of shot size or the emotional or kinetic quality of a shot.



WOMEN WALKS IN FRONT OF CAR. WE VIEW HER FROM BEHIND.

WIDE SHOT–WOMEN + CAR

REVERSE ANGLE AS SHE'S CAUGHT IN HEADLIGHTS. CAMERA MOVES INTO C.U.

M.C.U. – WOMAN

Figure 3.9: Written descriptions in boxes are the simplest type of storyboard.

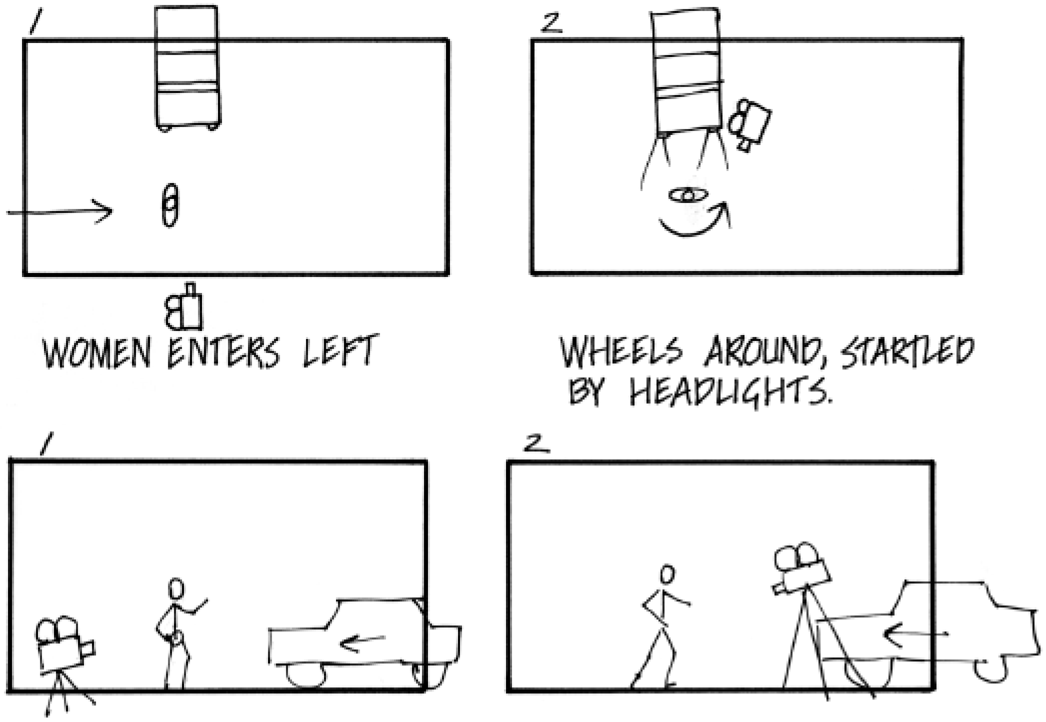


Figure 3.10: Schematic drawings.

One alternative is to use stick figures that convey figure placement and the direction of action. Two versions of these are shown in Figure 3.11. What stick-figure illustrations do not show is the height of the camera, since perspective is not indicated. Still, for all their crudeness, these four panels are quite informative. These panels can be drawn in less than a minute, and yet they tell us a great deal about how each pair of frames would cut together. A director could greatly refine the shot size for a sequence using drawings no more complex than these. With a little extra work, arrows drawn in perspective can tell a great deal about the angle of view the director would like to see, as shown in Figure 3.12.

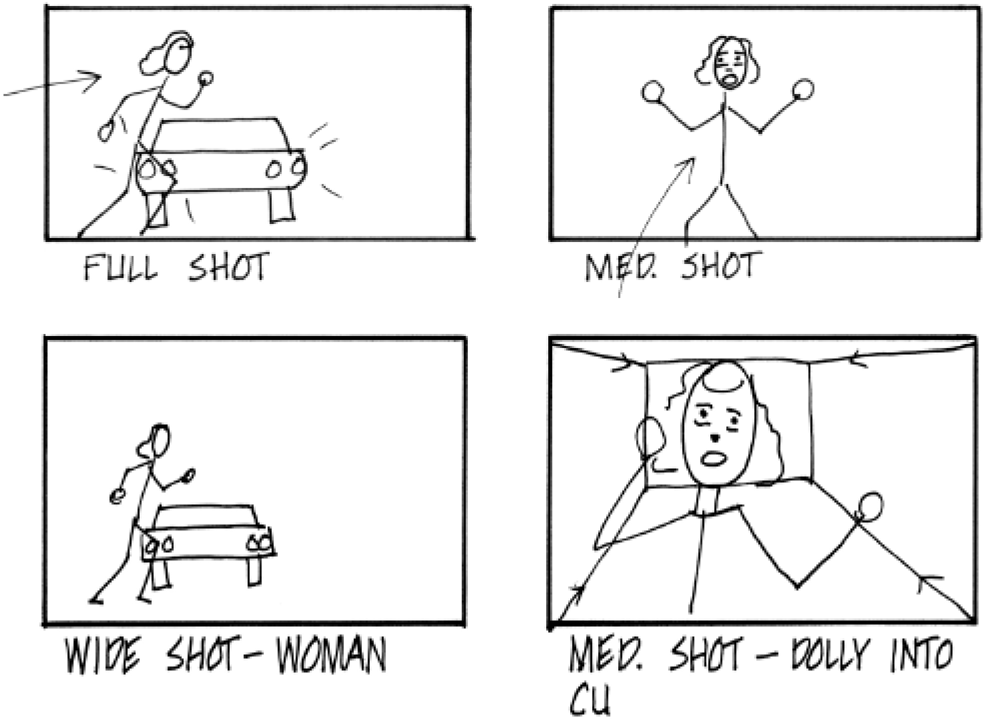

FULL SHOT
MED. SHOT
WIDE SHOT - WOMAN
MED. SHOT - DOLLY INTO CU

Figure 3.11: Stick figures without perspective.

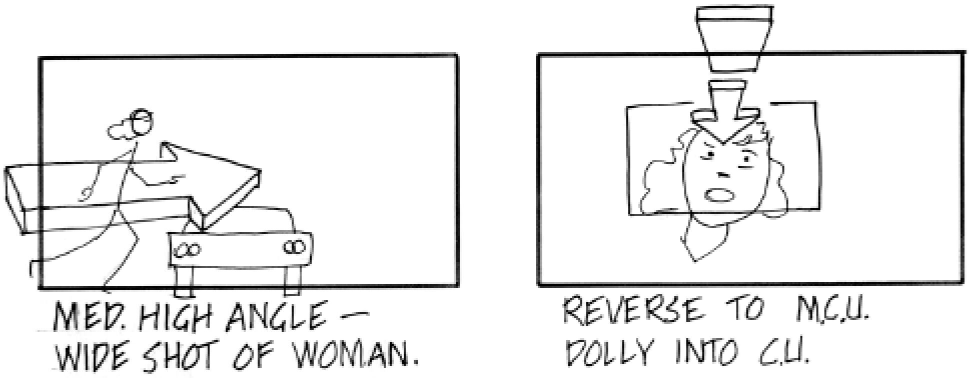

MED. HIGH ANGLE - WIDE SHOT OF WOMAN.
REVERSE TO M.C.U. DOLLY INTO C.U.

Figure 3.12: Arrows can be added to indicate perspective.

Arrows are a versatile sign and easily mastered. A wide selection is shown in Figure 3.13. They can be used to illustrate the motion of the camera or the subject of a shot or both. Arrows can show the complex path of a runaway car, or can be used in schematic drawings to show the path of the camera in a sequence shot.

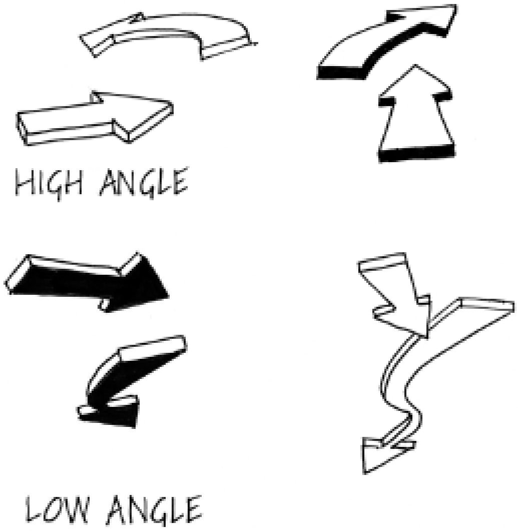


Figure 3.13: Arrows like these are an excellent way to indicate the camera angle and camera movement. With a Little practice, they can easily be mastered.

Another variation is the arrowheads in Figure 3.14, describing a whole range of angles. To help visualize these quickly a director might keep a page of arrows like the ones here or have his art director supply him with an assortment that he could copy when drawing stick figures. This will save the director time when he tries to figure out the perspective.

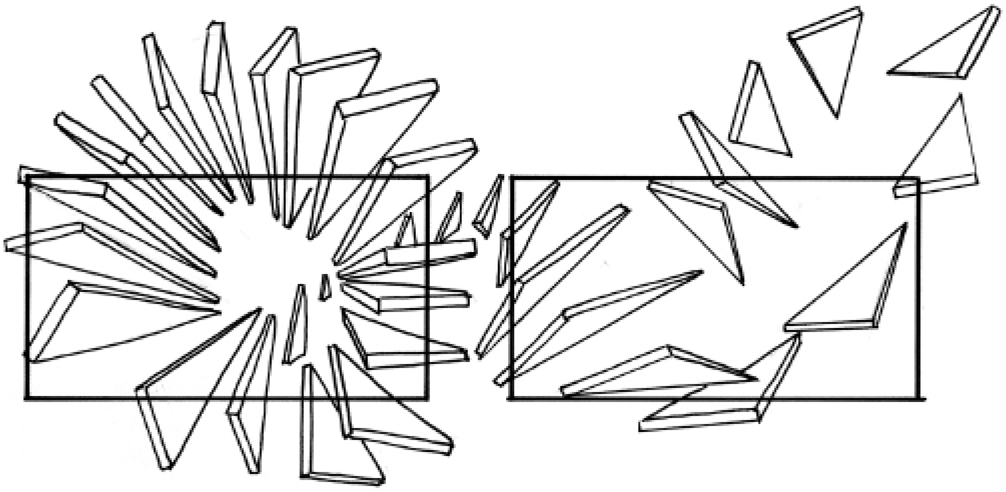


Figure 3.14: Keep a supply of arrows to trace onto storyboards.

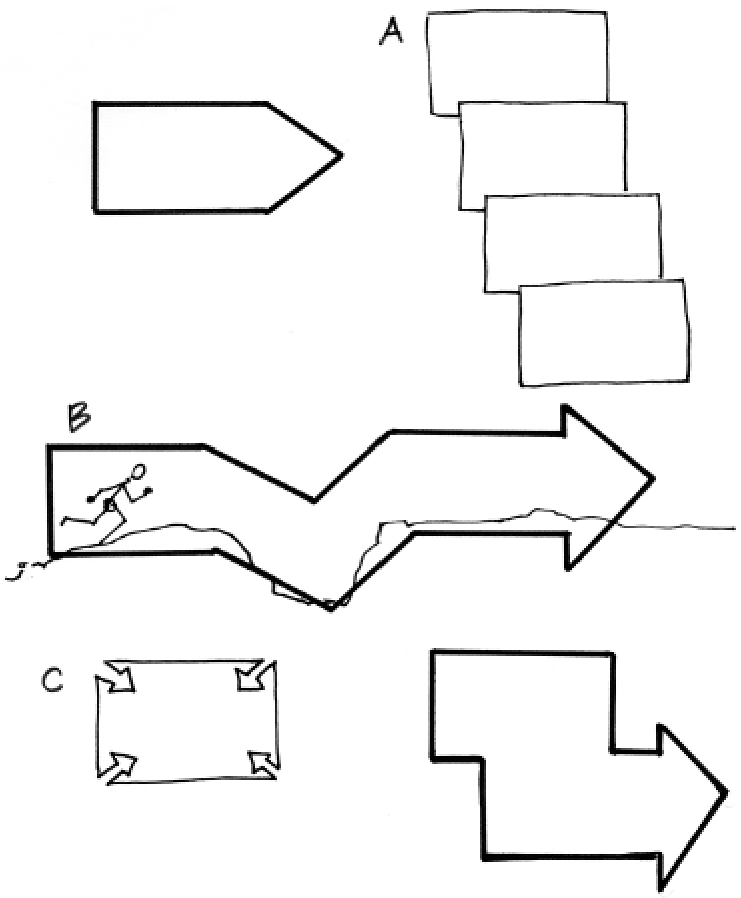


Figure 3.15: Overlapped panels can be used to indicate a moving shot (A). The entire frame can be drawn as an arrow to indicate the path of a moving subject (B). Illustrator uses the frame border for arrows to indicate a camera move to the subject (C).

The frame itself can be used as an arrow to show the path of the camera over a scene. Overlapped frames can serve the same purpose. If the lines between overlapped frames are left in, this may mean that the camera stopped during the movement and moved on again. Figure 3.15 shows representative examples of these ideas.

Returning to the problem of showing perspective with stick figures, one way is to enclose them in simple three-dimensional boxes to describe the camera angle. Figure 3.16a shows two low-angle shots that, without the boxes, would not indicate the height of the camera. A variation in Figure 3.16b shows an extreme low-angle and a high-angle CU. As you can see, the car has been treated as a box to help define the perspective. Even in these simple drawings, the box technique helps tell us where the camera is placed. Even if you have no drawing experience whatsoever, learning to control the angle of a simple box like the ones used here is simple to master. Again, a single page of cubes in varying angles can be used for reference and can be provided by the production designer.

By adding form and volume to simple figures, we get a better sense of spatial relationships. For instance, Figure 3.17 shows us how a director might try several versions until he was satisfied with the staging of the car and the woman in the frame.

The most important point to be made in this chapter is that storyboards are helpful to the director whether he follows them during shooting or not. For instance, after large portions of the script are boarded the director is able to see the dramatic flow of the story in a way that the screenplay fails to reveal. Moreover, the process of visualizing on paper is a technique for generating ideas, not just establishing the plan for the production team to follow on the set. This process is even more beneficial when the director works on his own drawings. There is really no way to overestimate the importance of rolling up your shirtsleeves and working directly with images if you are directing a film. No matter how crude the drawings, the thought process and state of mind required to compose shots on paper is invaluable.

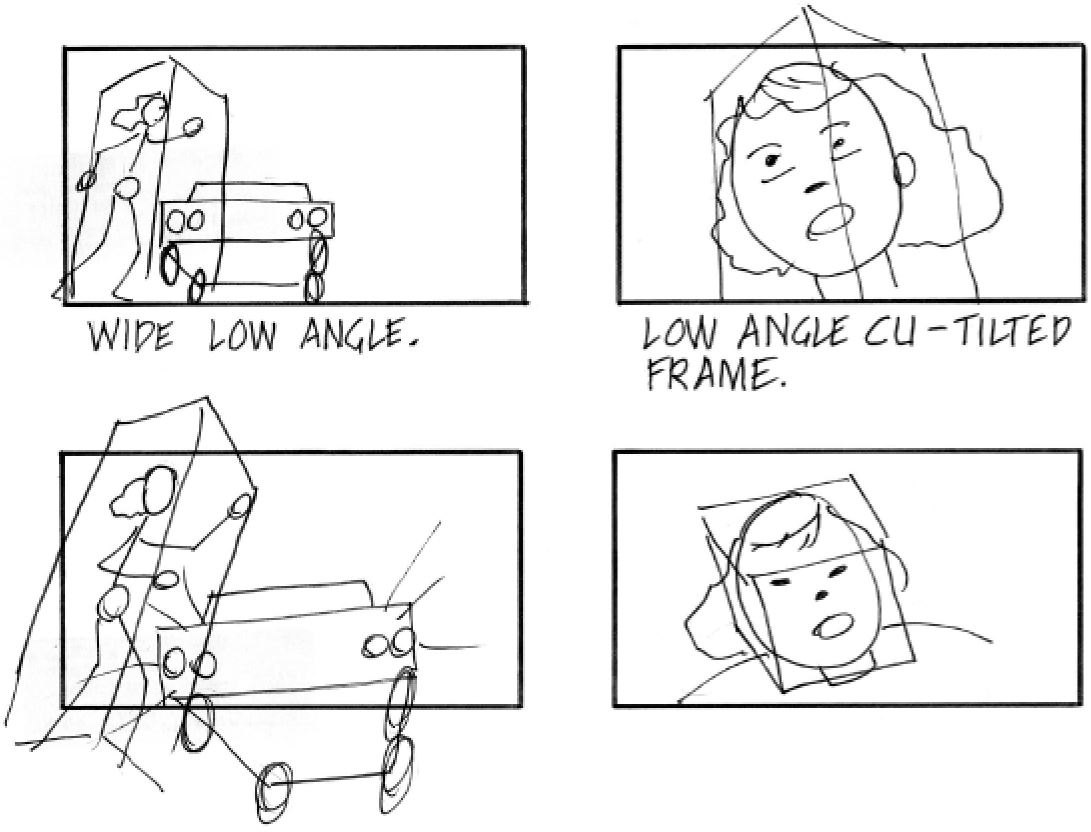

WIDE LOW ANGLE.
LOW ANGLE CU-TILTED FRAME.

Figure 3.16: Perspective boxes drawn over stick-figures help indicate camera angle.

Director Brian De Palma drew his own stick-figure illustrations on a Macintosh computer using the now-defunct software program Storyboarder®, but simple as the drawings are, it is likely that they serve as mnemonic devices, each frame an icon that brings to mind a familiar and detailed shot with all the perspective elements left out. Of course, what works for De Palma may not work for you. You may find a different type of representation that suits your needs better. One of the pleasures in acquiring the storyboards for this book was discovering the many individual approaches to storyboarding that each illustrator developed.

Draftsmanship

If you can draw, there is no reason not to carry your storyboards to a higher degree of execution. While it's clearly beyond the scope of this book to teach drawing it is possible to convey one thought that is particularly valuable to storyboard artists: *It's what you leave out that counts*. Actually, I first heard this truism while playing music, and it seems to crop up whenever you're around seasoned artists of any kind. For a storyboard, artist simplicity is more than a matter of taste. It is also a matter of necessity. Only in rare cases is there time to make detailed drawings for every storyboard panel in a film.

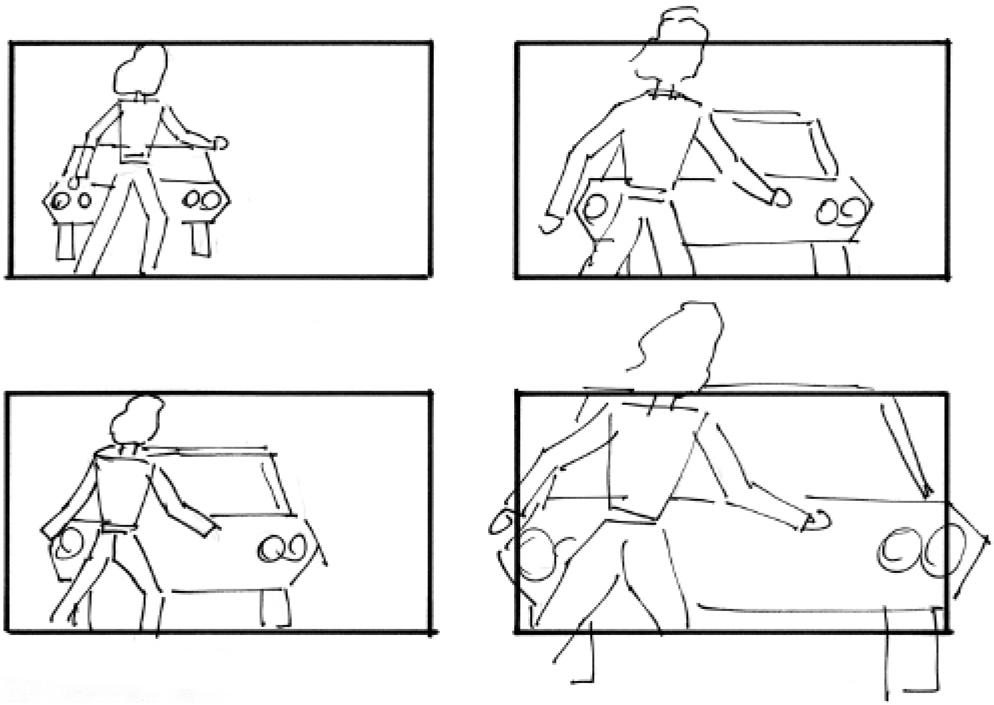


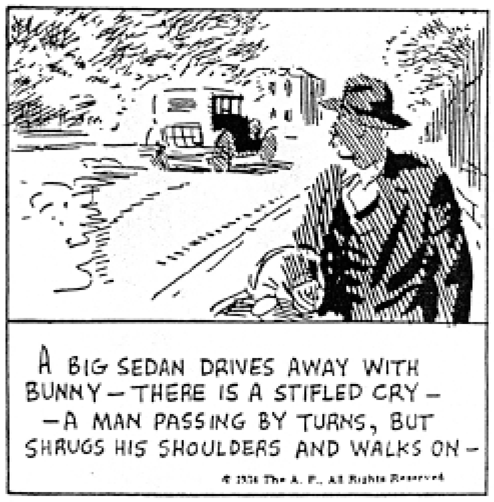
Figure 3.17: Adding volume to stick figures conveys a great deal of compositional information.

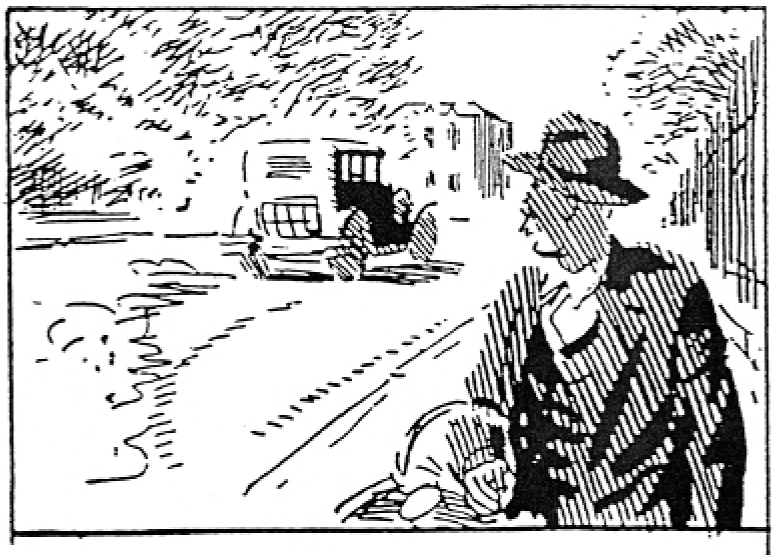
Illustrator Noel Sickles's line work is a model of simplicity and is an object lesson in economical drawing and inking. Though never a storyboard illustrator, his highly innovative work in the comics and later as a nationally recognized commercial illustrator is still an influence today. Appearing on page 51 are frame enlargements of his early work on the *Scorchy Smith* strip to show how only a few lines are needed to convey all types of surfaces and locales. The background details are particularly useful to study if you're looking to develop a practical storyboard style.

Even the simplest drawing style is useful to help the director shape a scene. Appearing on page 52 are very quick sketches drawn by Sherman Labby for *Beverly Hills Cop II*. These types of ink and tone thumbnail sketches are typically drawn in meetings with the director, each frame taking only 1–3 minutes. That means that an entire sequence can be talked out and drawn within an hour. However, it would be wrong to think of storyboarding solely in terms of the drawing. Actually, it is often the time spent working out the concept for a scene that determines how quickly a sequence is rendered on paper. Usually, drawings like the ones for *Beverly Hills Cop II* are used by the storyboard illustrator as notes for more finished renderings, which are submitted later.

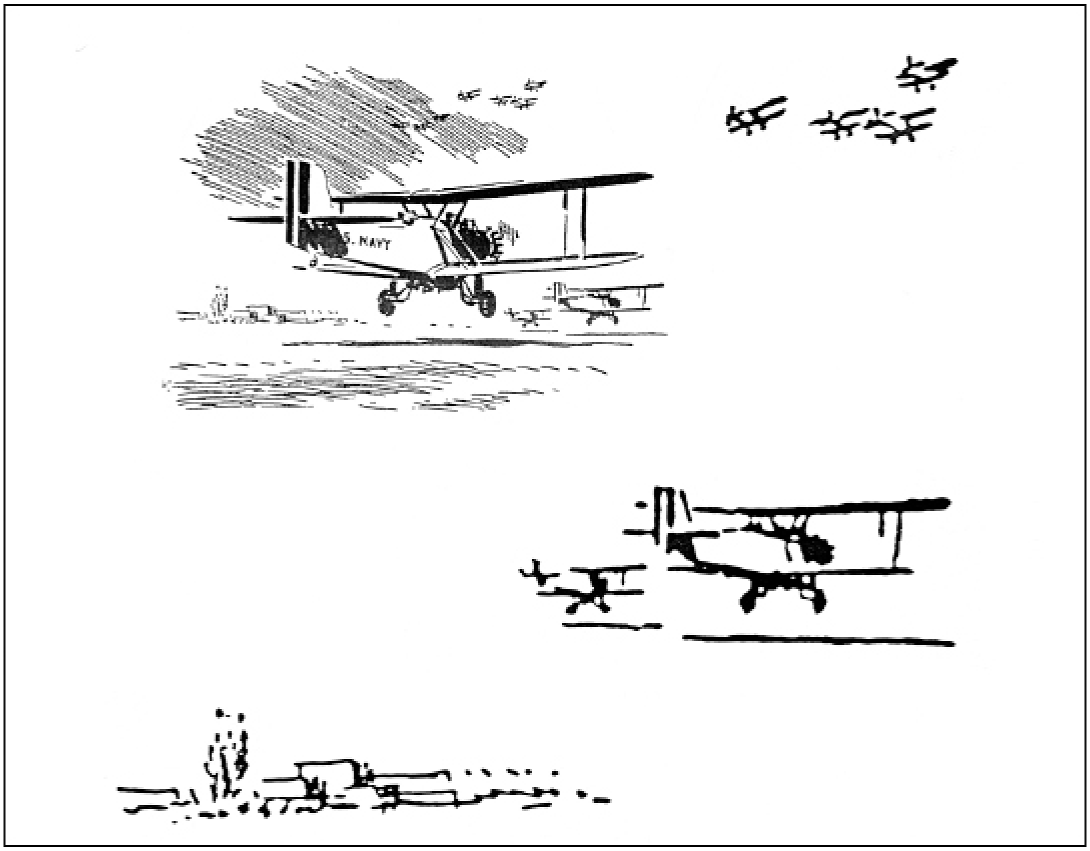
Mood

Another series of storyboard panels by Sherman Labby appears on pages 53 to 61 and shows his fine sense of pictorial narrative in an opening scene from *Blade Runner*, one of two scenes that was never filmed. This is a beautiful example of the use of mood to establish the tone of a film, in this case, the ironic use of a calm, pastoral setting. The opening shows the Harrison Ford character, Decker, landing his Spinner vehicle on a farm. These first few elegantly composed frames contain only a few simple shapes evoking a sense of wonder of '40s science fiction.

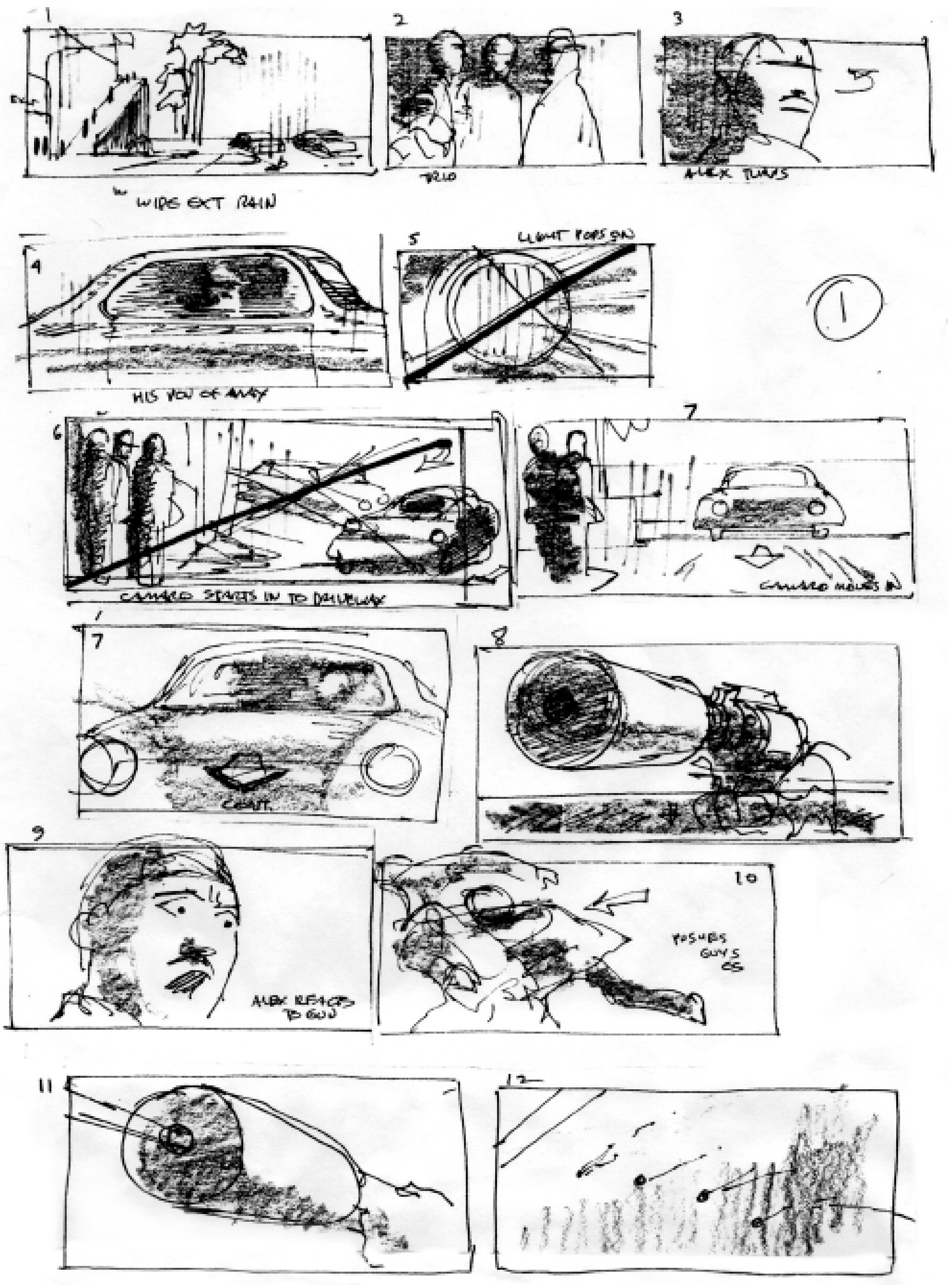

A BIG SEDAN DRIVES AWAY WITH BUNNY – THERE IS A STIFLED CRY – – A MAN PASSING BY TURNS, BUT SHRUGS HIS SHOULDERS AND WALKS ON –
© 1936 The A. P., All Rights Reserved



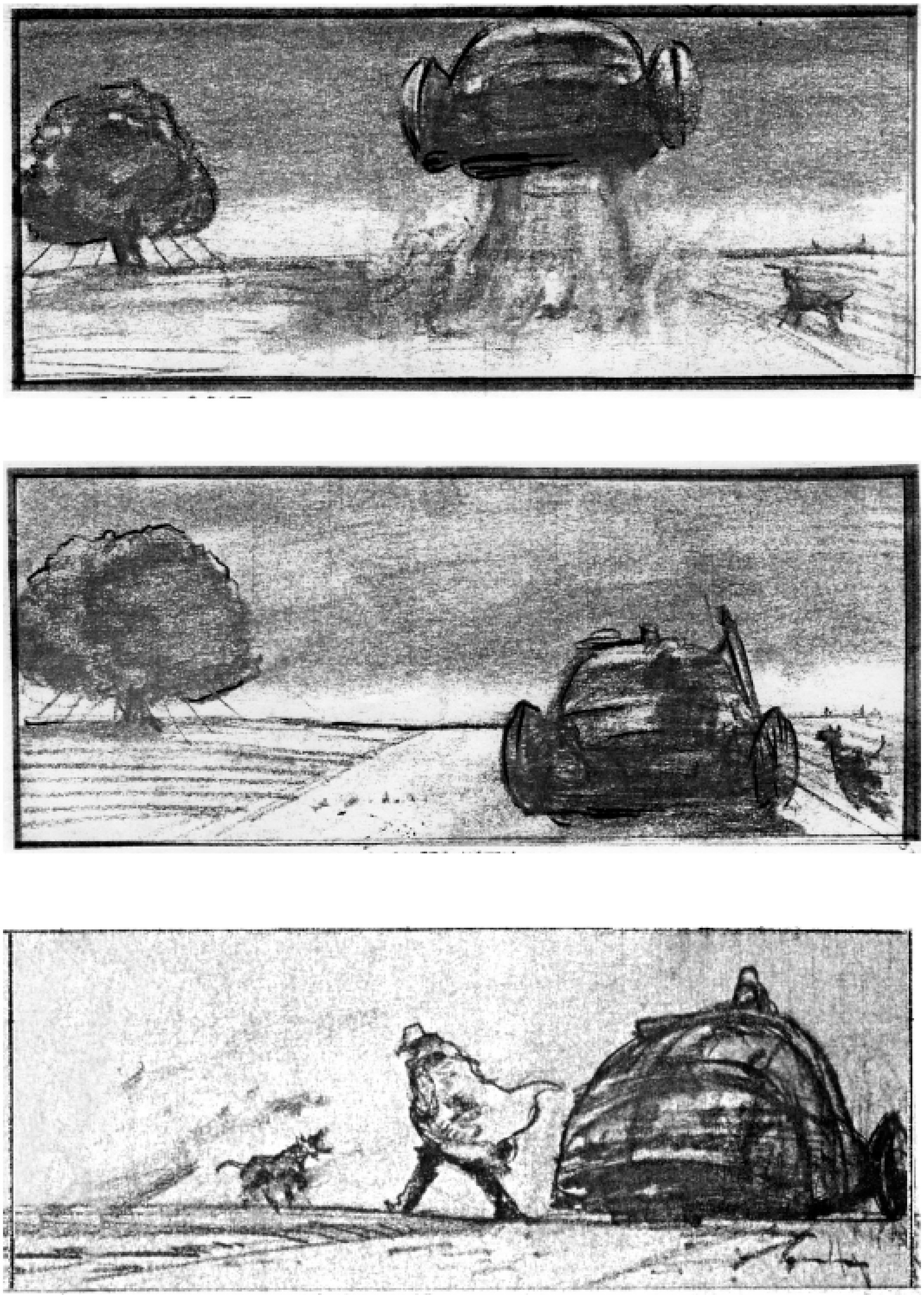
Noel Sickles began drawing comic strips in 1933 at the age of 26 and quickly invented an impressionistic black and white inking style that achieved a highly realistic photographic look. After five years, Sickles left the comic field and went on to become one of the foremost illustrators of his generation in magazine and book illustration.



These frame enlargements from Sickles's strip, Scorchy Smith, show how a few well-placed lines and shadows can convey a great deal of visual information. His work is filled with graphic solutions and innovations that are a storehouse of ideas for storyboard artists.

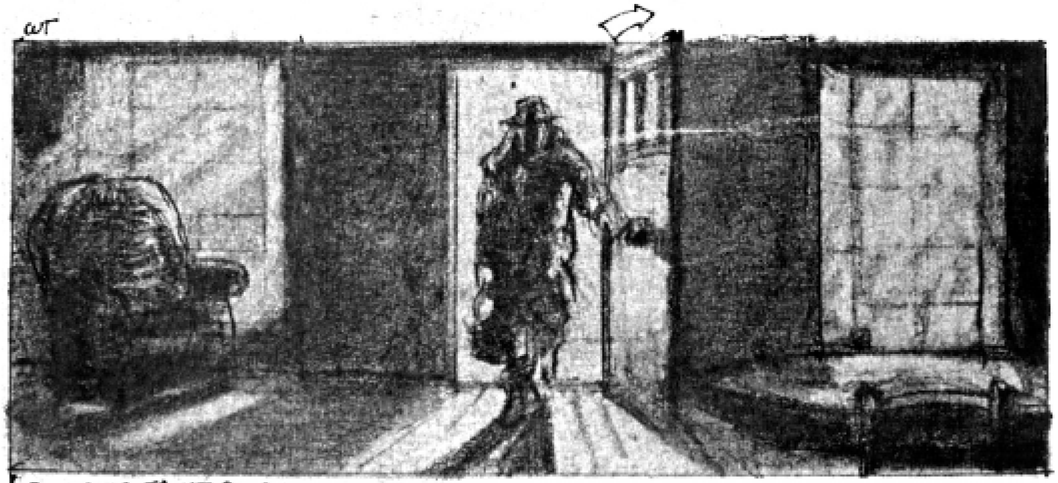

1
2
3
WIDE EXT RAIN
TRIO
ALEX TURNS
4
5
LIGHT POPS ON
HIS POV OF AWAY
①
6
7
CAMARO STARTS IN TO DRIVEWAY
CAMARO MOVES IN
7
8
CRAFT.
9
10
ALEX REACTS TO GUN
POSURS GUYS CS
11
12

Sherman Labby’s thumbnail sketches for a scene in *Beverly Hills Cop II*.

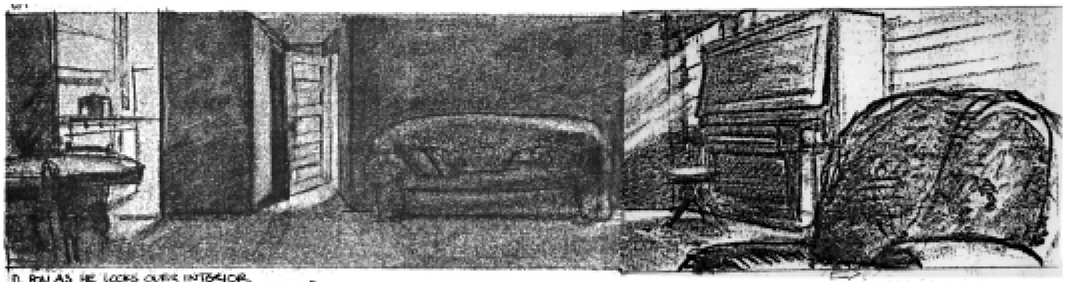


WIND BLOWS - D. WALKS TO FARMHOUSE - ⟸ CAM PAN

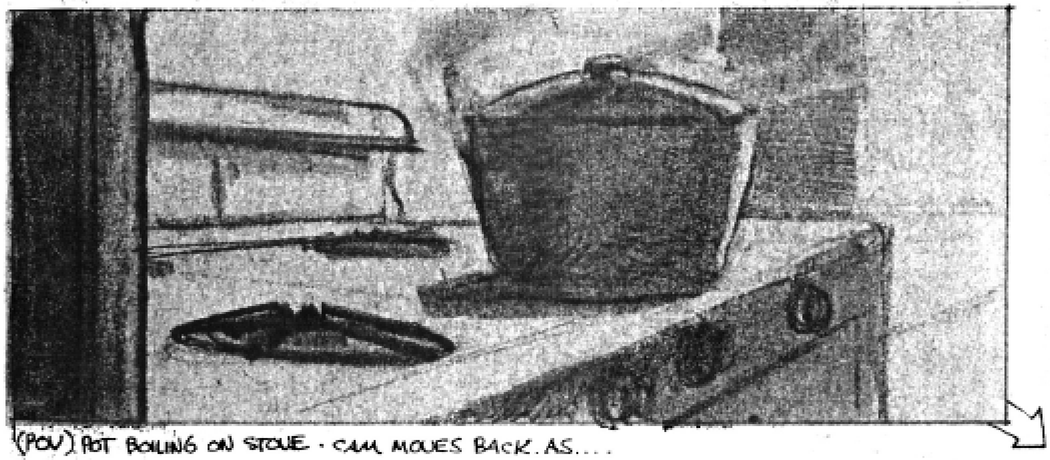
Sherman Labby’s storyboard for *Blade Runner*.



D. OPENS FRONT DOOR

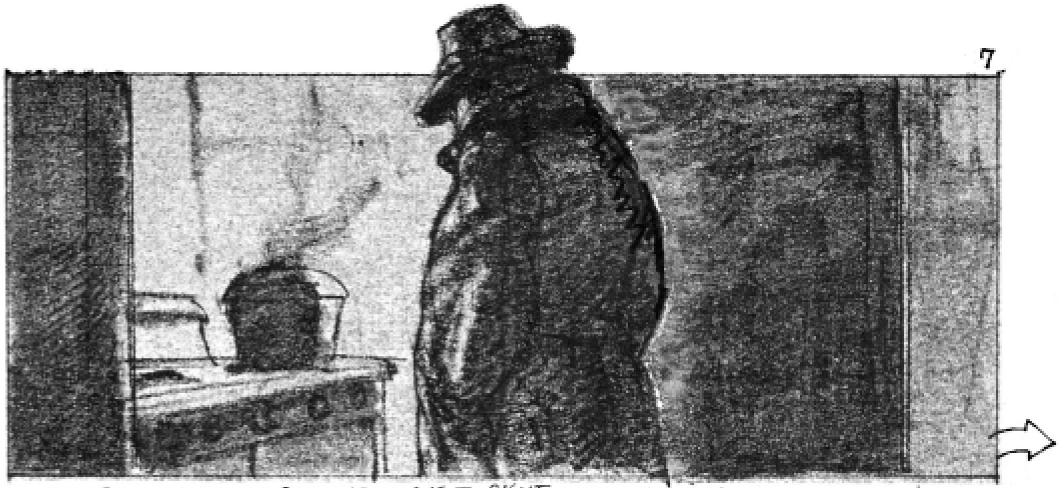


D. POV AS HE LOOKS OVER INTERIOR CAM PAN

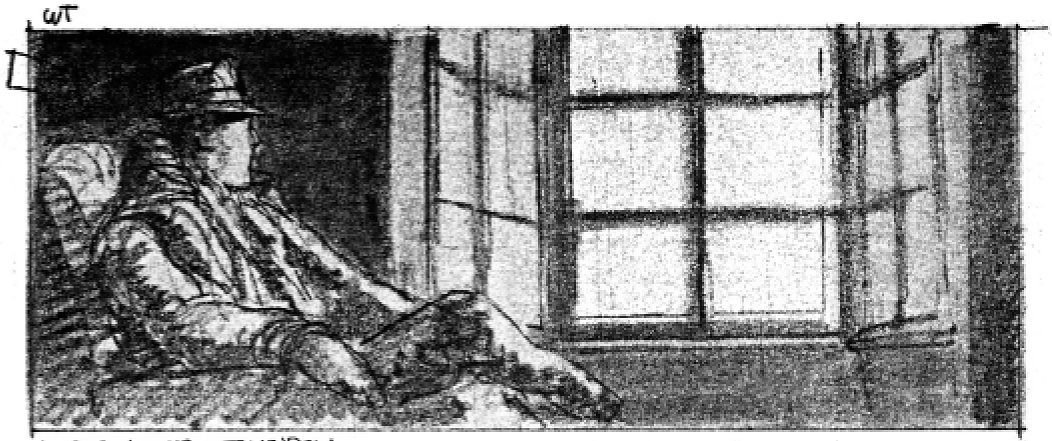


(POV) POT BOILING ON STOVE - CAM MOVES BACK AS....

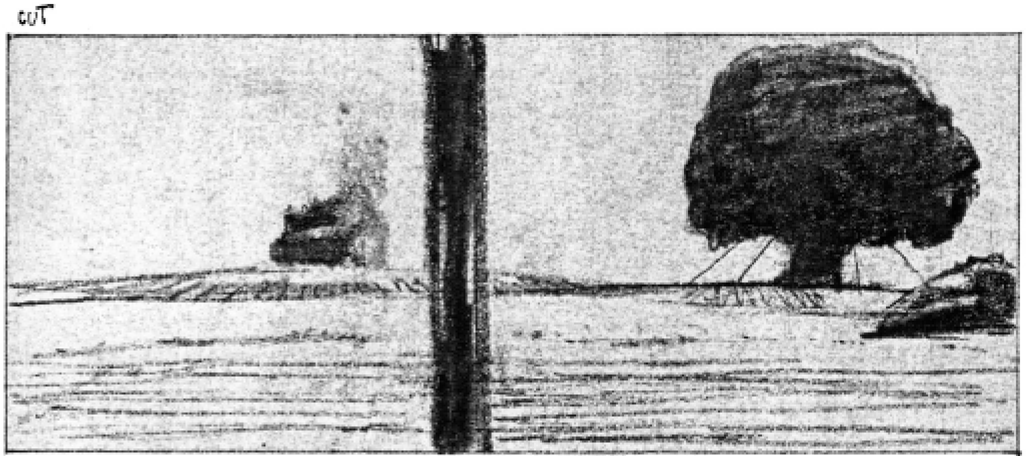
Sherman Labby's storyboard for *Blade Runner*.



RVL D. LOOKING AT POT., HE TURNS TO RIGHT.. CAM FOLLOWS

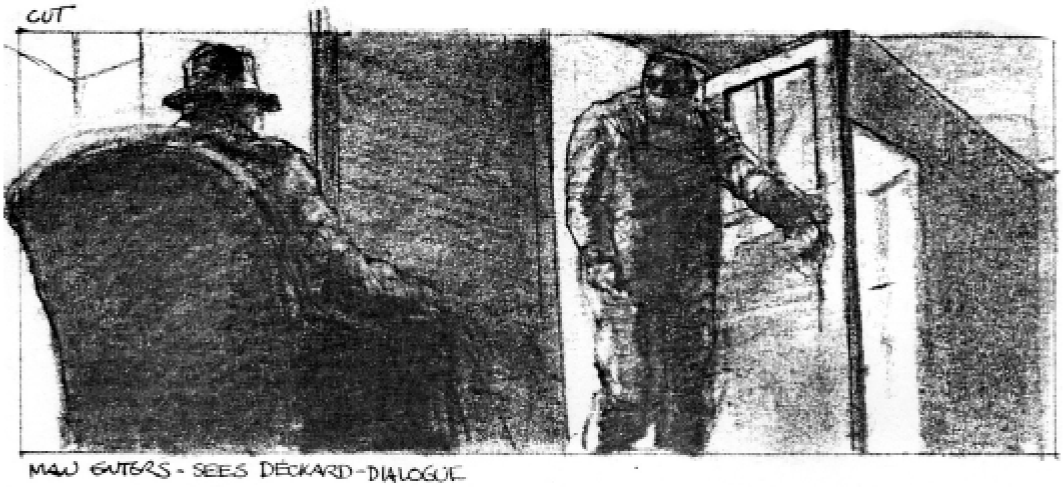


D. SITS - LOOKS OUT WINDOW

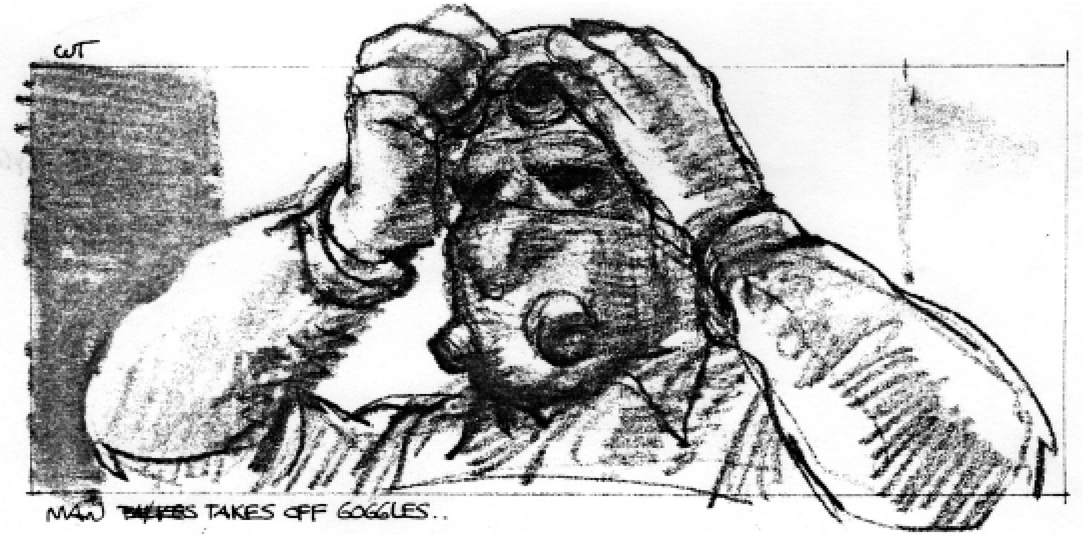


HIS POV OF GIANT TRACTOR MOVING TOWARD HOUSE

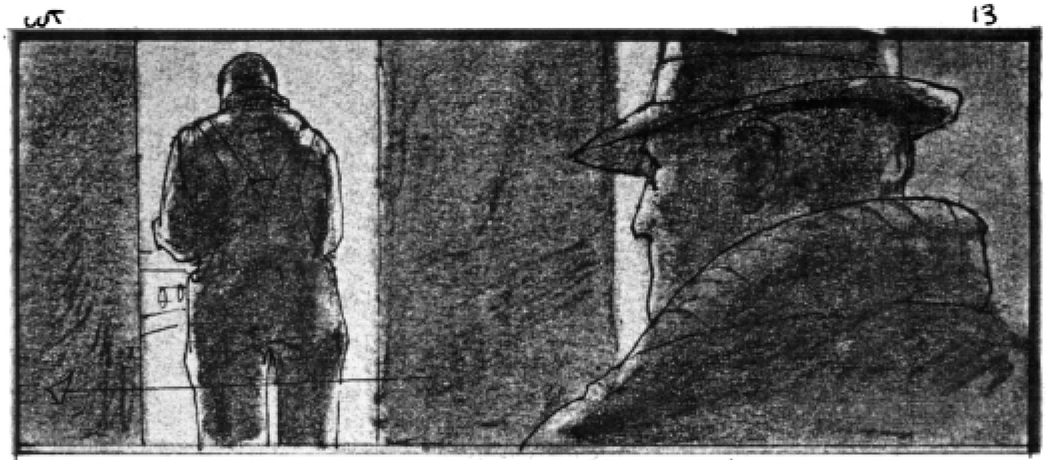
Sherman Labby’s storyboard for *Blade Runner*.



MAN ENTERS - SEES DECKARD - DIALOGUE



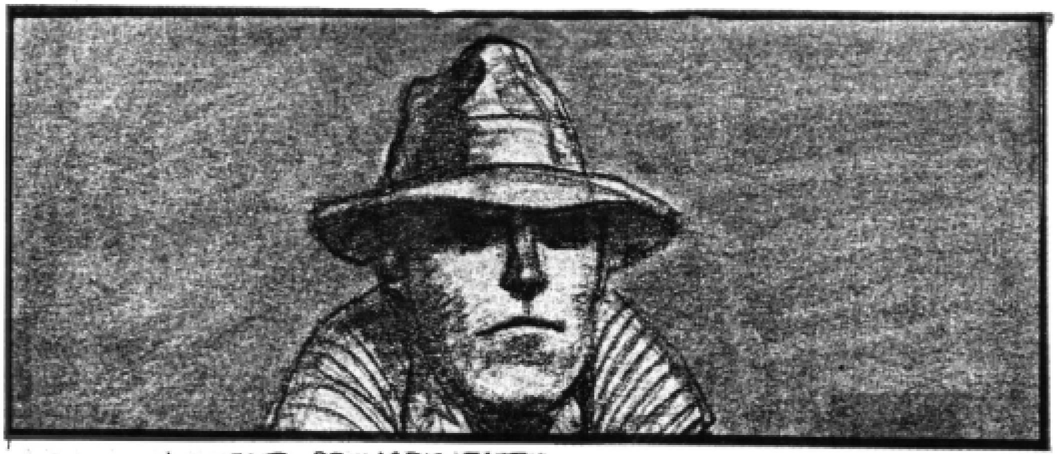
MAN TAKES OFF GOGGLES..



MAN MOVES TO KITCHEN - D. CROSSES FRAME (DIALOGUE)

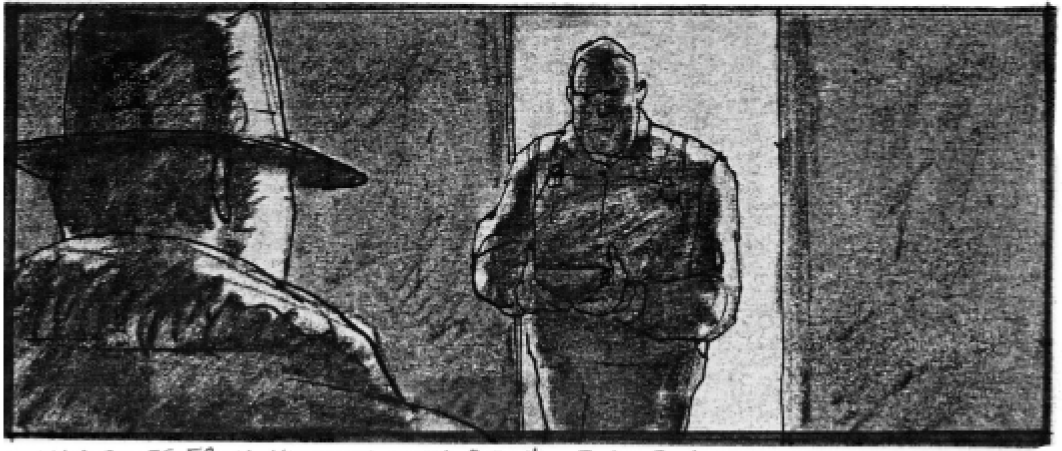
Sherman Labby's storyboard for *Blade Runner*.

CUT

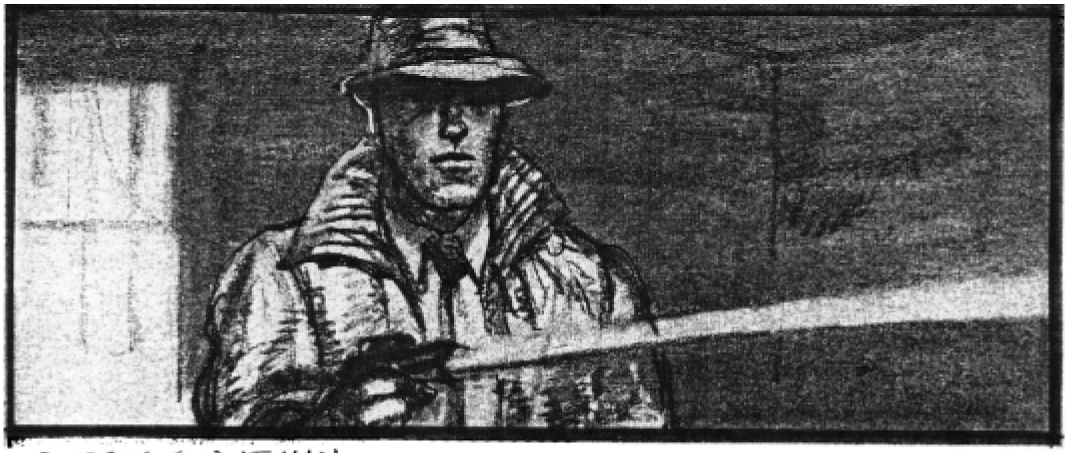


RESOLUTION COMES TO DECKARD'S FACE

CUT 14

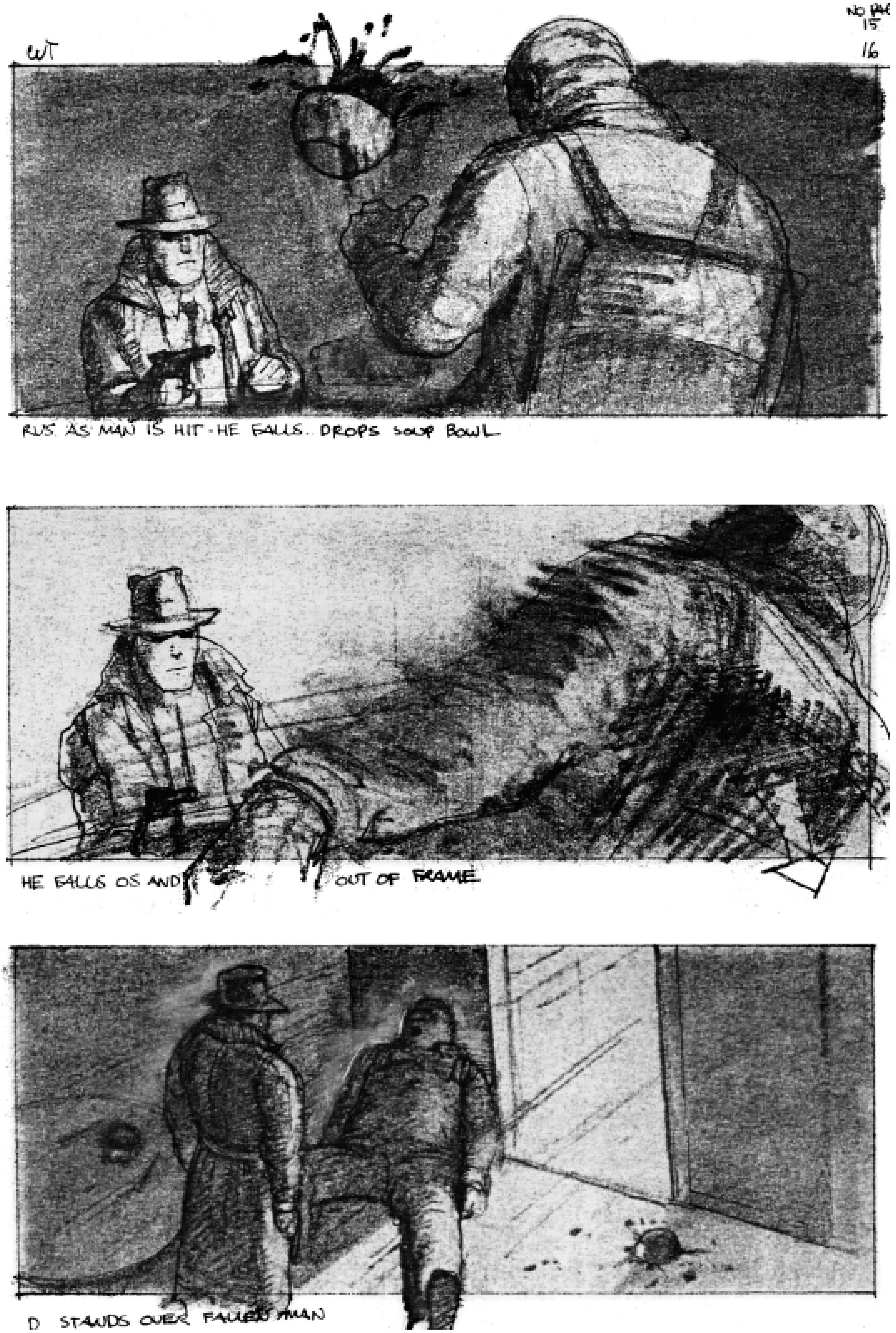


MAN COMES FROM KITCHEN WITH BOWL OF SOUP (DIALOGUE)

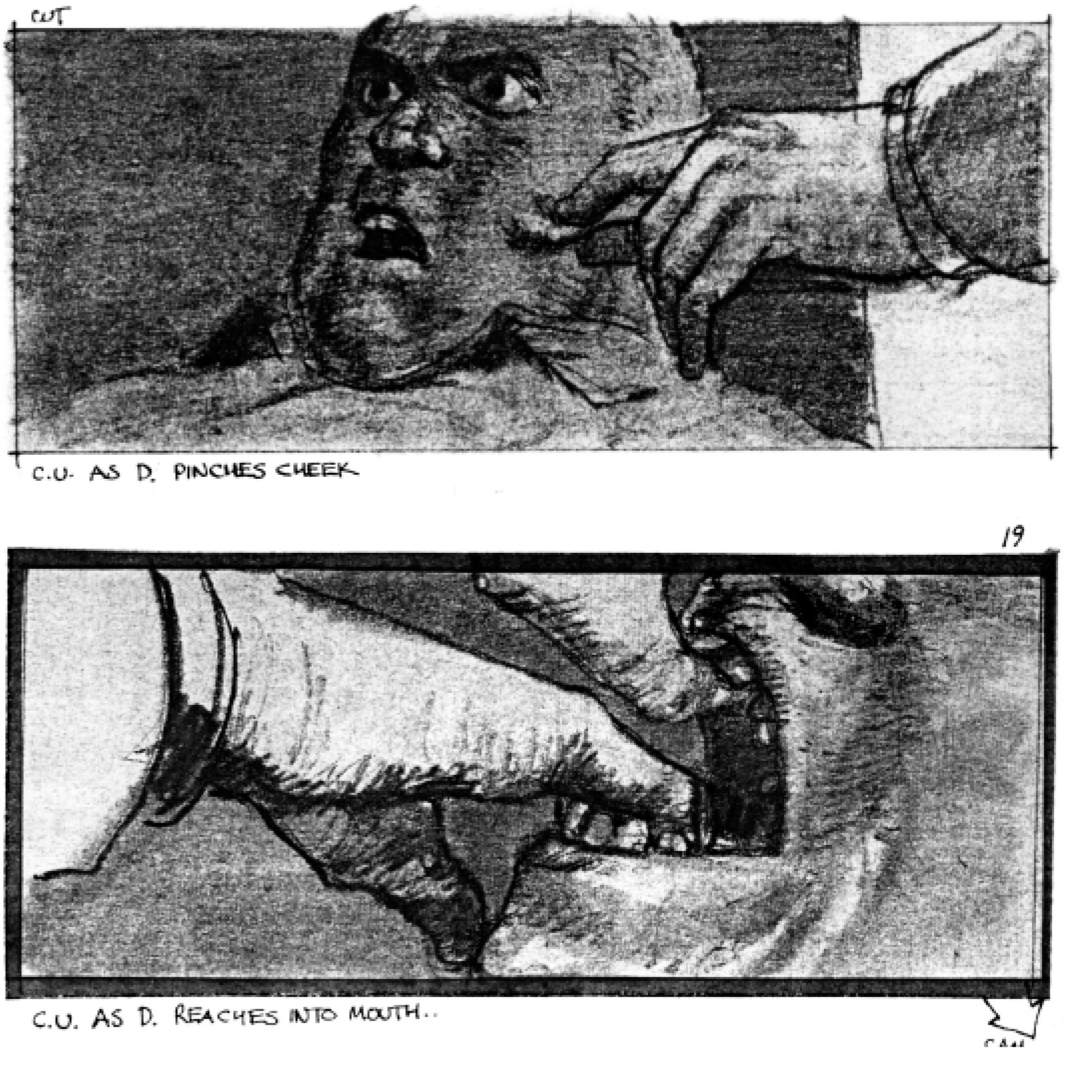


D. FIRES GUN AT MAN

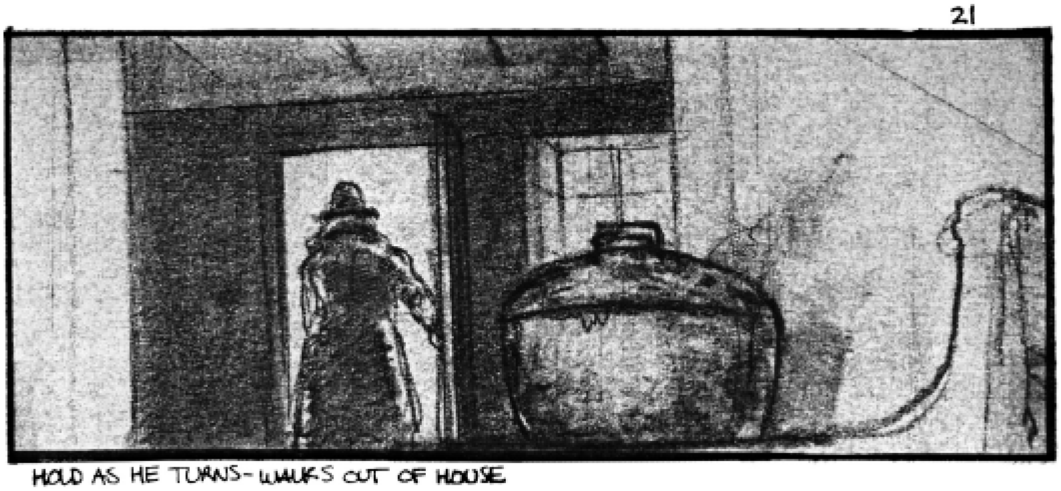
Sherman Labby's storyboard for *Blade Runner*.


WT
NO PA
15
16
RUS. AS MAN IS HIT - HE FALLS.. DROPS SOUP BOWL
HE FALLS OS AND
OUT OF FRAME
D STANDS OVER FALLEN MAN

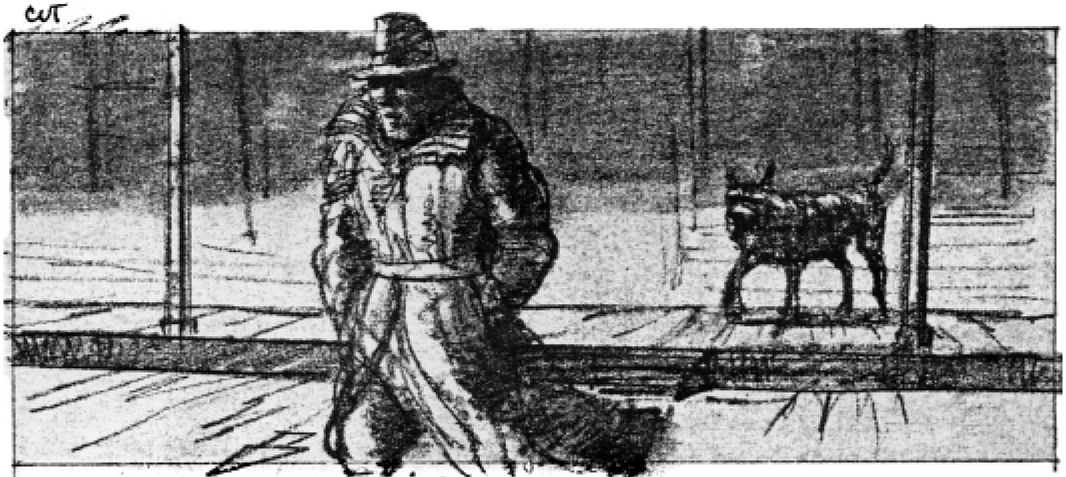
Sherman Labby’s storyboard for *Blade Runner*.


CUT
C.U. AS D. PINCHES CHEEK
19
C.U. AS D. REACHES INTO MOUTH..
HE PULLS OUT 'JAWBONE' WITH SERIAL NO ON IT

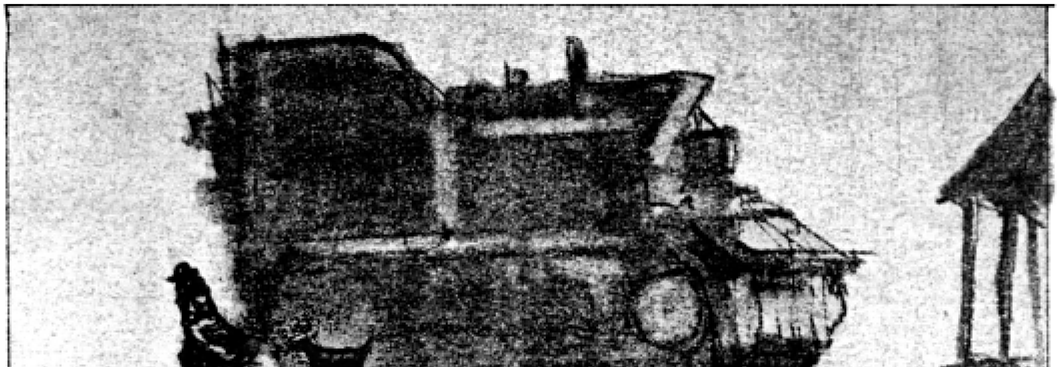
Sherman Labby’s storyboard for *Blade Runner*.



HOLD AS HE TURNS- WALKS OUT OF HOUSE

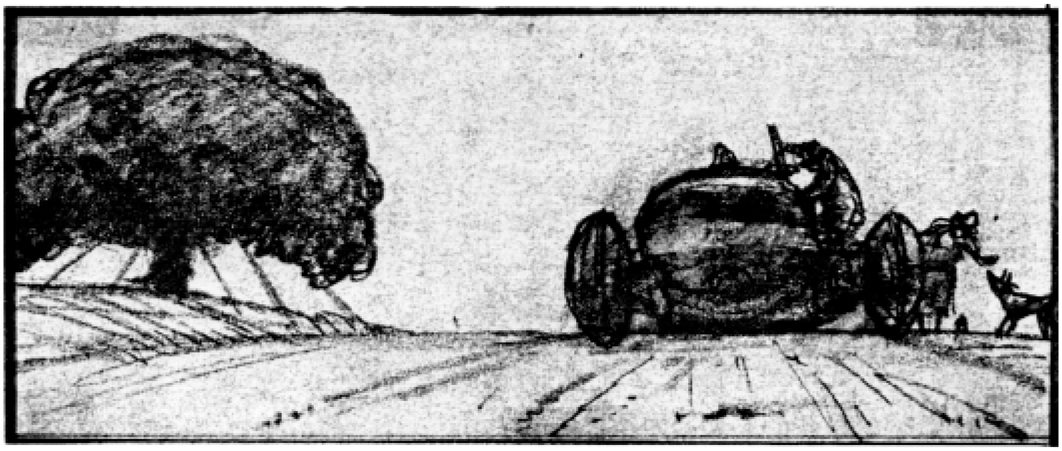


HE WALKS ACROSS YARD- DOG FOLLOWS

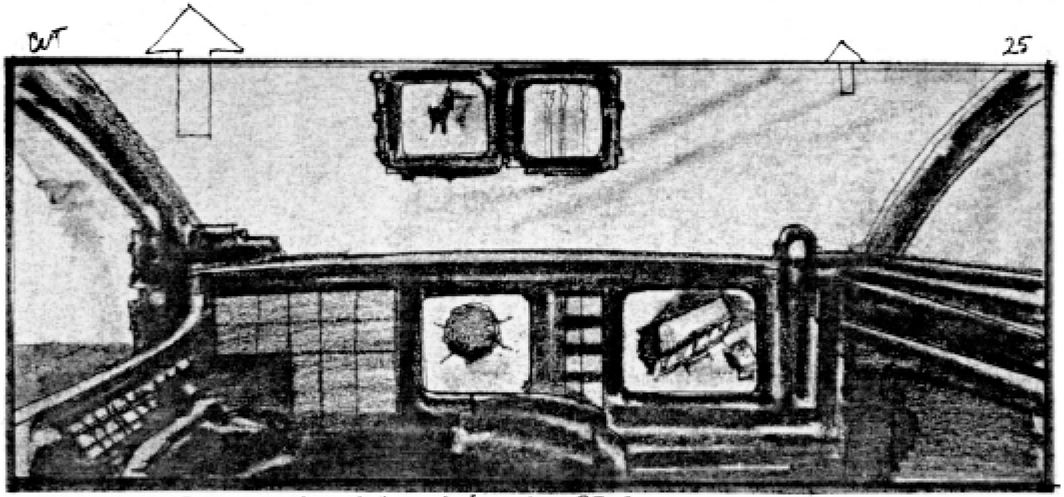


D. WALKS TOWARD SPINNER FOLLOWED BY DOG- GIANT TRACTOR STANDS SILENT

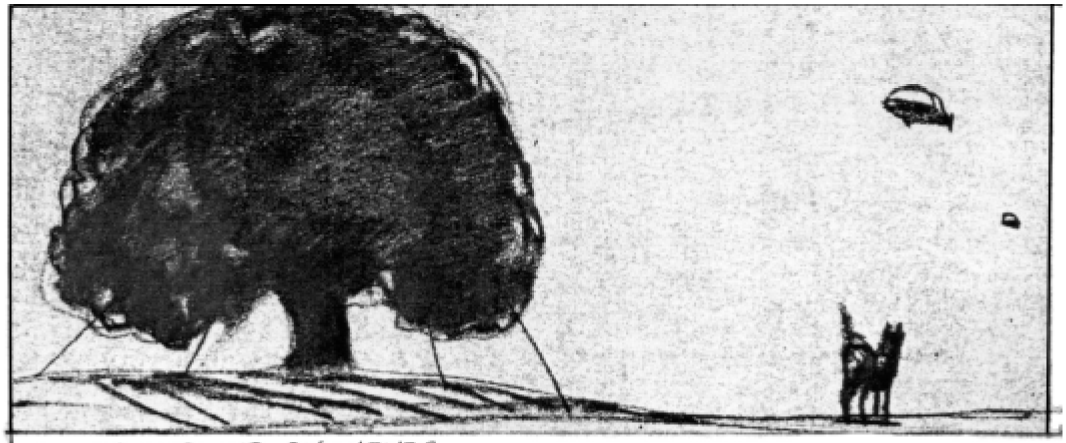
Sherman Labby's storyboard for *Blade Runner*.



CAM FOLLOWS D. - HE ATTEMPTS TO PET DOG - DOG BACKS OFF - D. ENTERS SPINNER



POV DECKARD - SPINNER INT. RISES / MONITORS SHOW DOG TREE + FARM.



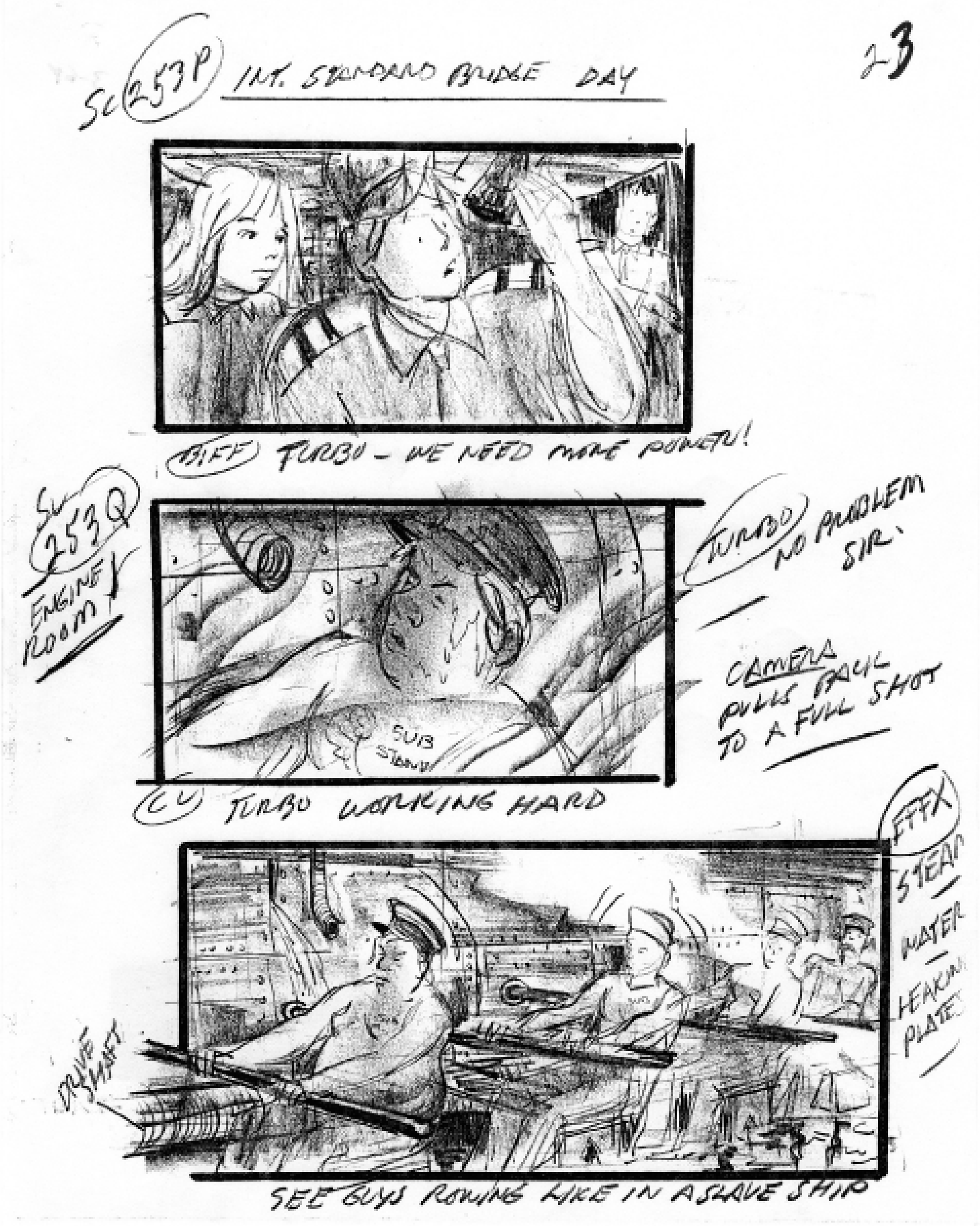
SPINNER MOVES OFF - DOG WATCHES

END SQ

Sherman Labby’s storyboard for *Blade Runner*.

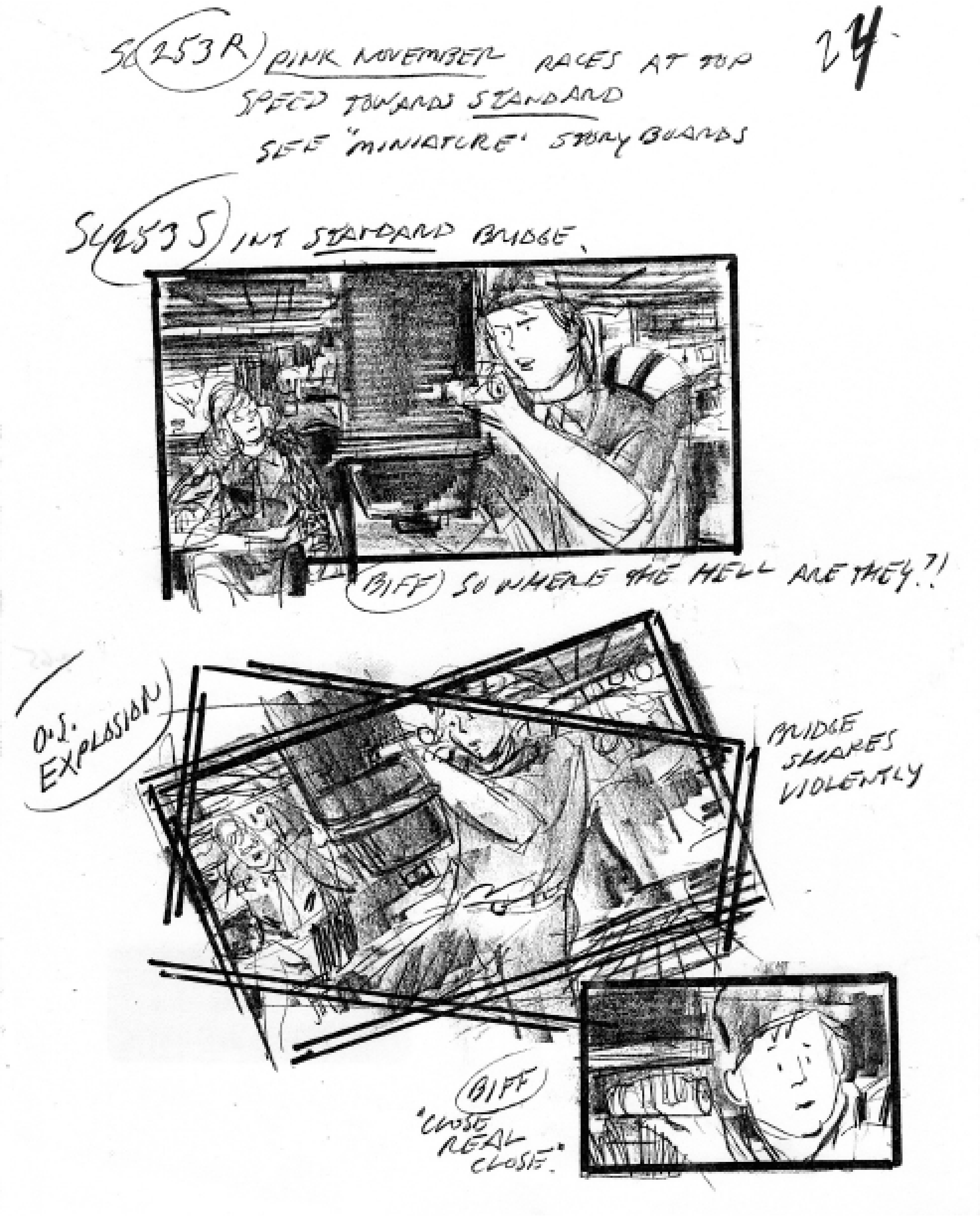
Character

The next storyboard panels by Fred Lucky show how expressive characters help to make the comedic intention for each setup clear. Fred refined his drawing and cartooning skills in the animation department of Disney Studios before moving into their live-action division as a gag writer. For several years now, Fred has been doing freelance storyboarding on four or five films a year, and is much in demand for his ability to interpret and write comedy and action sequences.



SC 253P INT. STANDARD BRIDGE DAY
2-3
BIFF TURBO – WE NEED MORE POWER!
SC 253Q
ENGINE ROOM
TURBO NO PROBLEM SIR.
SUB STAND
CAMERA PULLS BACK TO A FULL SHOT
CU TURBO WORKING HARD
EFFX
STEA
WATER
LEAKIN
PLATE
DRIVE SHAFT
SEE GUYS ROWING LIKE IN A SLAVE SHIP

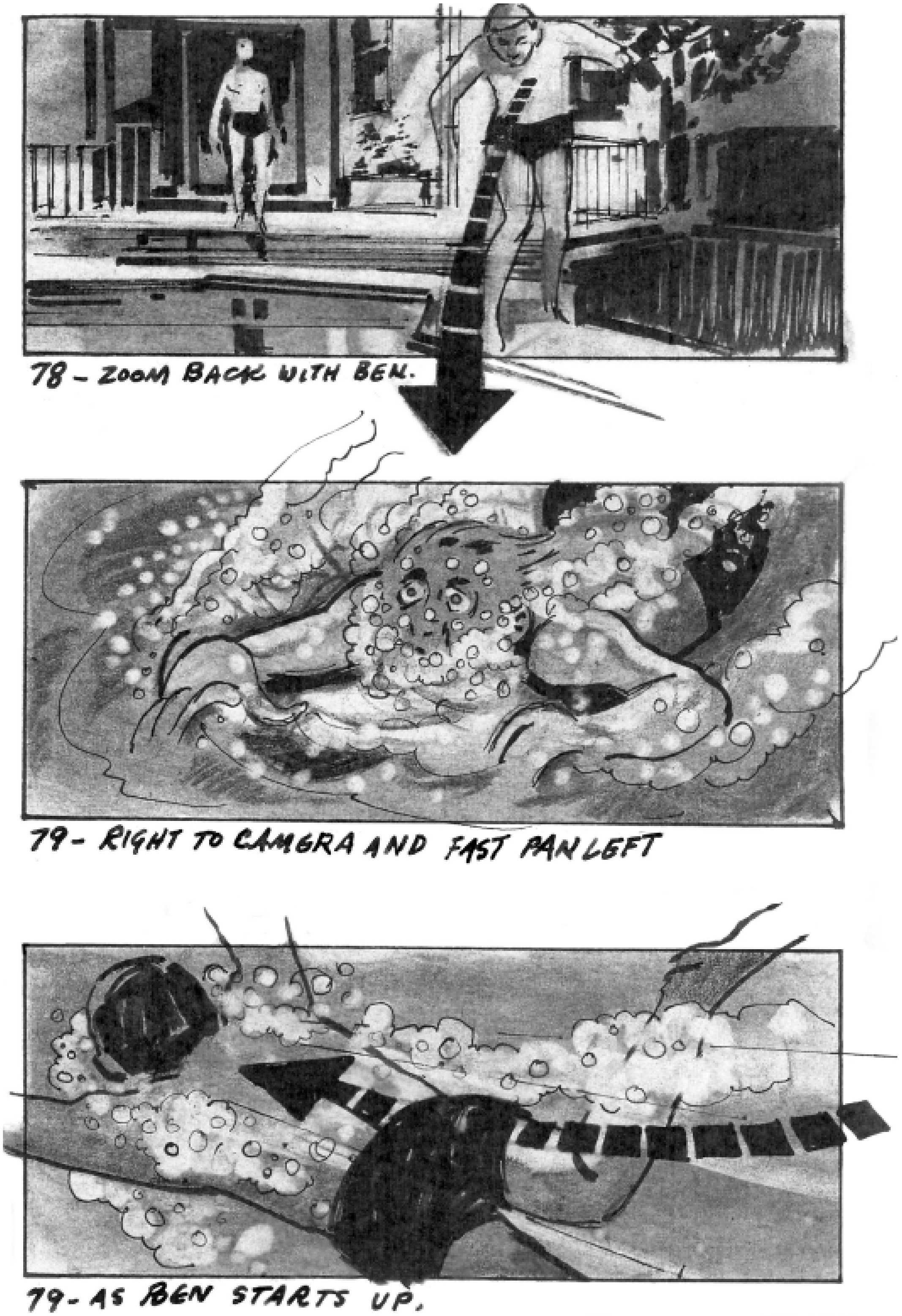
A storyboard by Fred Lucky.


SC 253R PINK NOVEMBER RACES AT TOP SPEED TOWARDS STANDARD
SEE 'MINIATURE' STORY BOARDS
24
SC 253S INT STANDARD BRIDGE.
BIFF SO WHERE THE HELL ARE THEY?!
O.S. EXPLOSION
BRIDGE SHAKES VIOLENTLY
BIFF
"CLOSE REAL CLOSE."

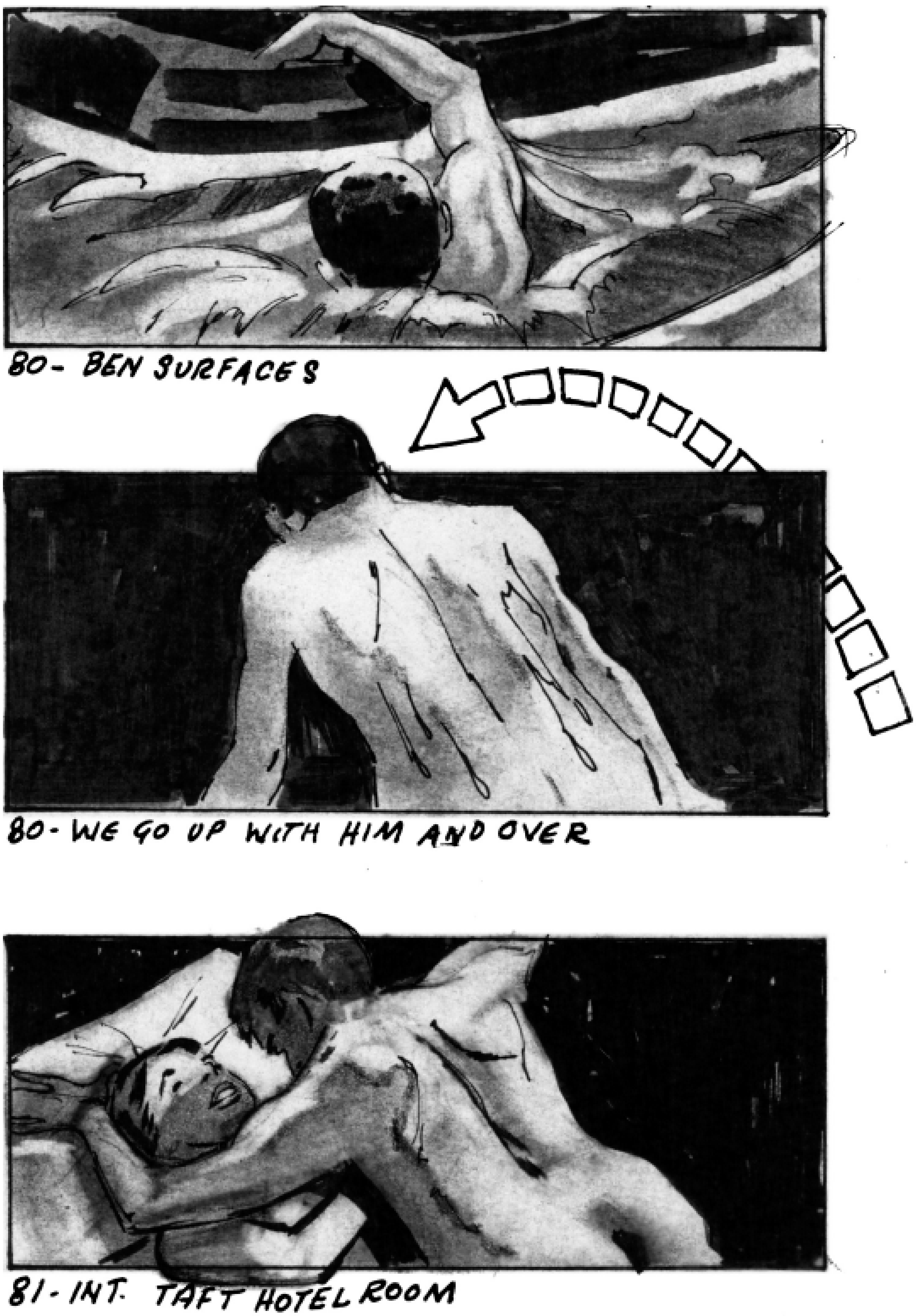
A storyboard by Fred Lucky.

Interpretation

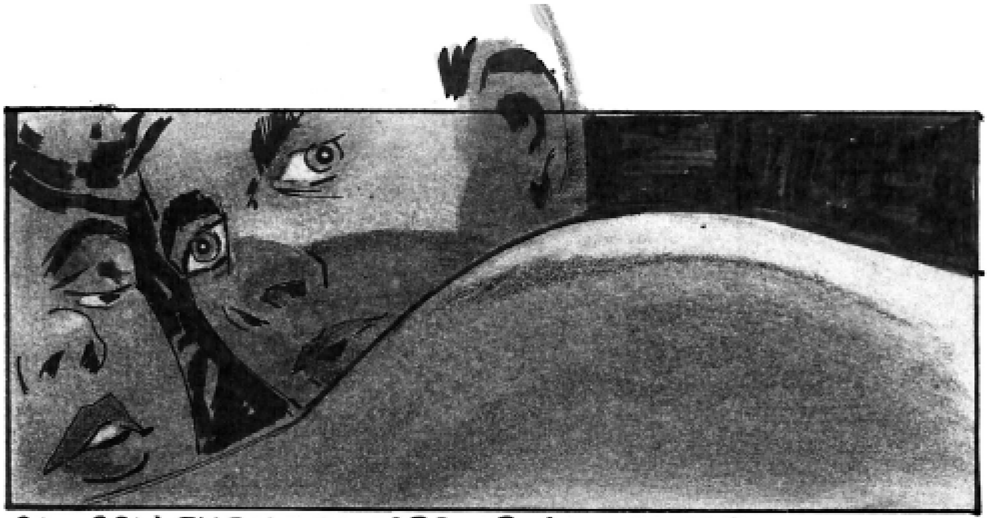
Above all, the storyboard conveys the shot flow of the scene, which is the combination of dramatic and graphic design. In the case of the best production illustrators, it also conveys mood and tone, but practically speaking, the use of viewpoint, lens perspective, and narrative motion are paramount. An excellent example of all of these qualities is seen in Harold Michelson's storyboards for *The Graduate*, beginning on page 64. The production design is by Richard Sylbert.


78 - ZOOM BACK WITH BEN.
79 - RIGHT TO CAMERA AND FAST PAN LEFT
79 - AS BEN STARTS UP.

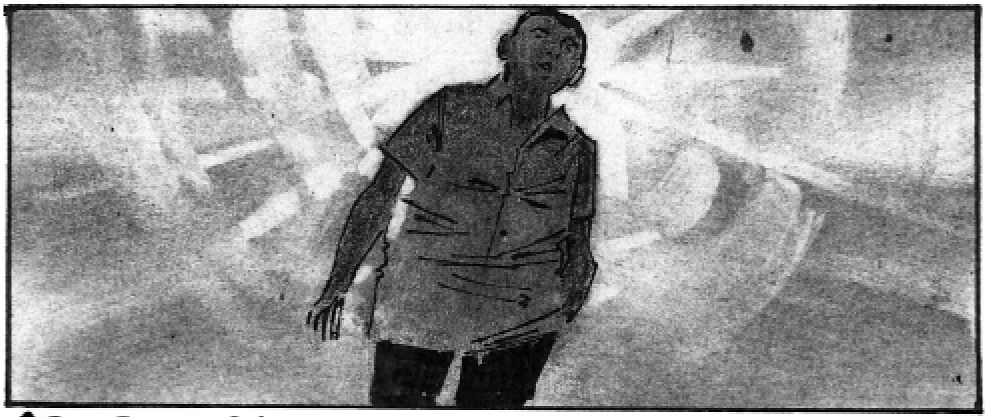
Harold Michelson’s storyboards for *The Graduate*, Production design by Richard Sylbert.


80- BEN SURFACES
80- WE GO UP WITH HIM AND OVER
81- INT. TAFT HOTEL ROOM

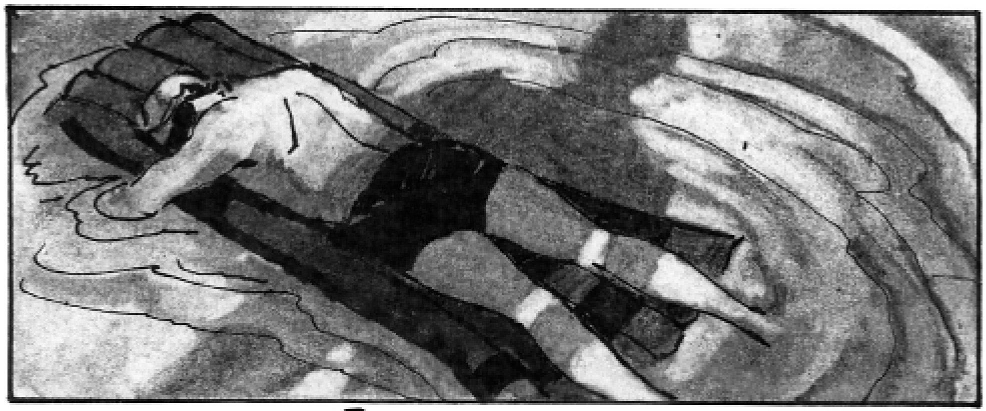
Harold Michelson’s storyboards for *The Graduate*, Production design by Richard Sylbert.



81- BEN TURNS TOWARD US AND LOOKS

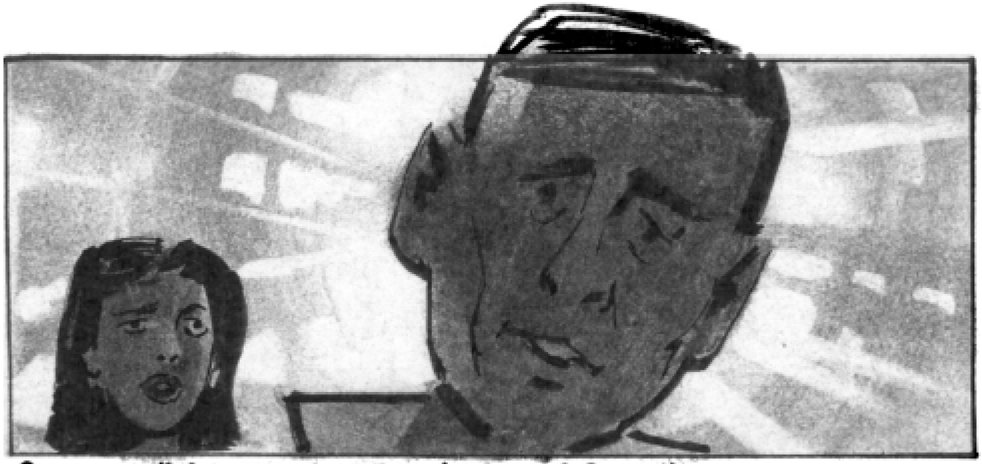


82- P.O.V. SHOT... MR. BRADDOCK AT POOL.

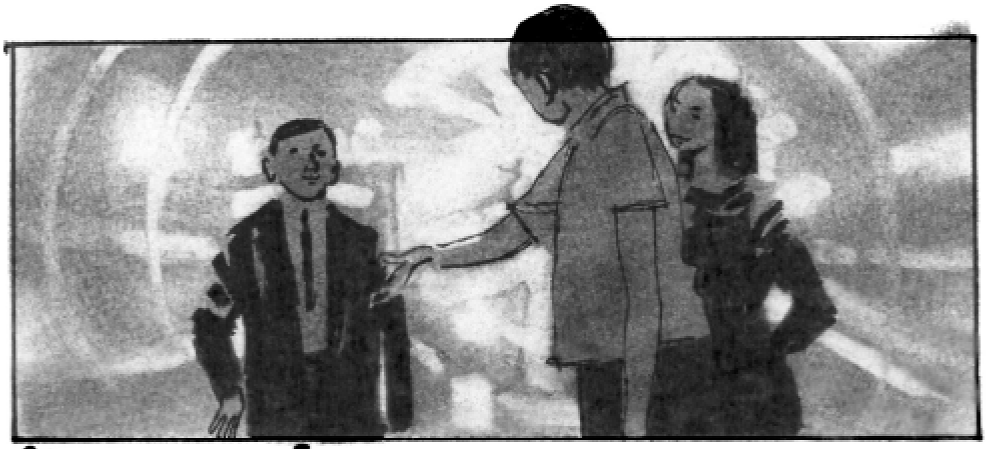


83- BEN ON RAFT.

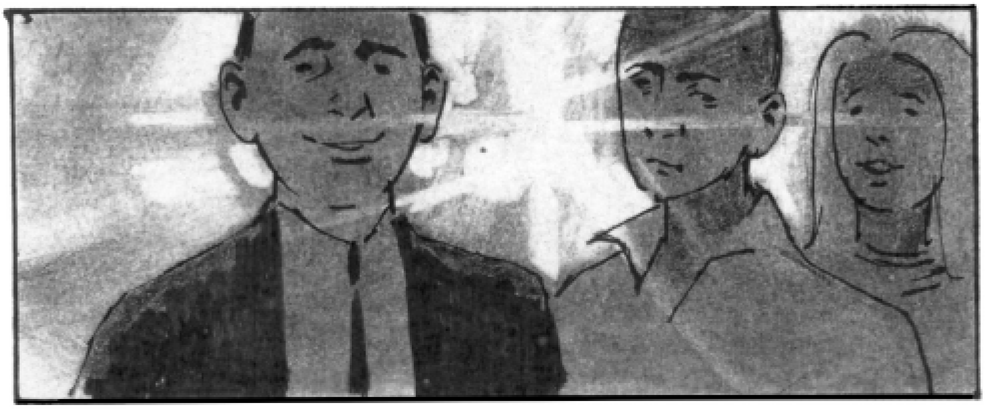
Harold Michelson’s storyboards for *The Graduate*, Production design by Richard Sylbert.



83- ... "GETTING OFF HIS ASS..."
"THE ROBINSONS ARE HERE."

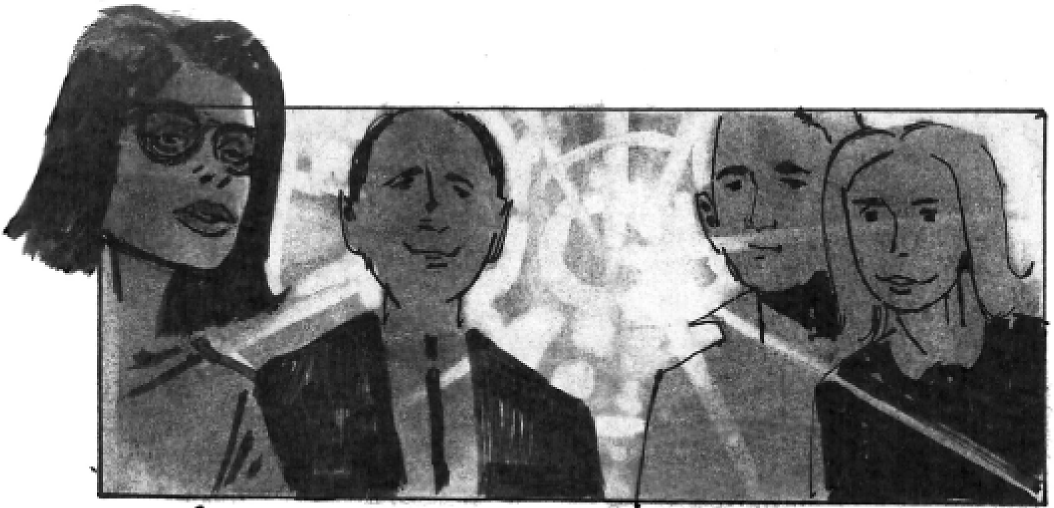


83

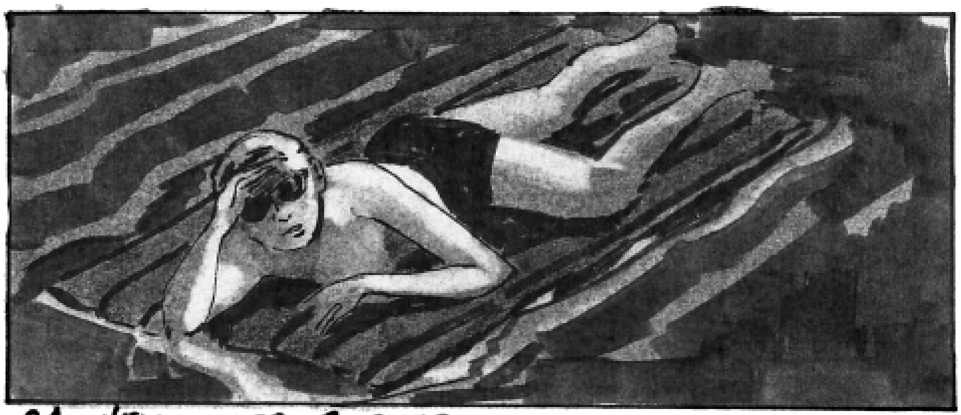


83- HI, BEN...

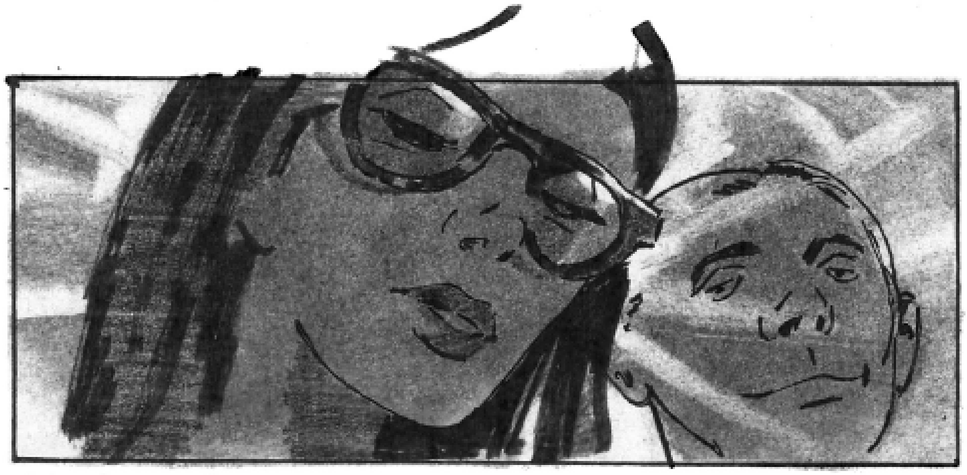
Harold Michelson's storyboards for *The Graduate*, Production design by Richard Sylbert.



83- SAY HELLO TO MRS. ROBINSON, BENJAMIN



84- HELLO, MRS. ROBINSON



84- HELLO BENJAMIN.

Harold Michelson’s storyboards for *The Graduate*, Production design by Richard Sylbert.

Even without a knowledge of the story, the action of the boards is easy to read and the cutting rhythm is clearly established. The individual and continuity design of panels 7, 8, and 9 is particularly elegant, with several effects cooperating to determine our relationship to the characters and to express Ben’s point of view and daydreaming. The angular use of the frame is subtle and fully motivated by the staging, as are the dramatic backlighting and shadow effect on the water. This is visual storytelling of a very high order. Graphic and compositional statements are never used as an end in themselves, but are in complete harmony with the subject and narrative intention. It’s about the story, not the storyboard art.

Adaptation

In a sense, all storyboards are adaptations, since they are transposed from a screenplay. Unlike a play or a novel, however, a screenplay is conceived as an intermediary form, a blueprint for the actual medium in which the narrative will appear. A screenwriter strives to be visual, to write drama that can be seen and heard; in fact, it *needs* to be seen and heard to be fully understood. In theory, the storyboard artist merely pictorializes the ideas in the screenplay, but in practice, the storyboard may come very close to being another draft of the screenplay if only to polish some of the ideas. In the same way that screenwriters describe visual elements, some storyboard artists suggest literary ideas, restructure scenes, add story elements, and contribute dialogue.

To get a better sense of how a story can be shaped for the screen, we can look at the way filmmaker Steven Spielberg adapted two scenes from J.G. Ballard’s autobiographical novel *Empire of the Sun*. In this case, Spielberg is largely responsible for the conceptual content of the storyboard. Fortunately, we have several stages of the process to compare: The novel; two drafts of the screenplay, the first draft dated January 7, 1986, by playwright Tom Stoppard and the revised third draft dated September 12, 1986, by Menno Meyjes; and, of course, the storyboard. The storyboard by David Jonas begins on page 71.

The Novel

The story follows the exploits of an eleven-year-old British boy, Jim, living in Shanghai with his wealthy parents. The year is 1941, at the moment the Japanese invade Shanghai. Our first scene opens at dawn in Jim's room at the Palace Hotel. In the novel, he is already awake and dressed in school clothes. He goes to the window overlooking the Shanghai waterfront along the Yangtze River. Jim watches two picket boats filled with Japanese marines and a motor launch of officers leave a Japanese gunboat. They board an American ship and a British ship. The launch flashes a message by signal lamp to the gunboat. Jim tries to signal back, moving his arms in semaphores that he never quite learned in the scouts. Within seconds, the gunboat fires a shell at the British ship and the shockwave rocks the hotel.

Startled Jim jumps back to his bed. This is the beginning of the invasion of Shanghai and within minutes, panicked guests are fleeing the hotel. Jim's father comes into his room and tells Jim that they are leaving in three minutes. Sitting on the bed, Jim considers that he is responsible for the Japanese attack.

He realized that he himself had probably started the war, with his confused semaphores from the window that the Japanese officers in the motor launch had misinterpreted.

The Screenplay

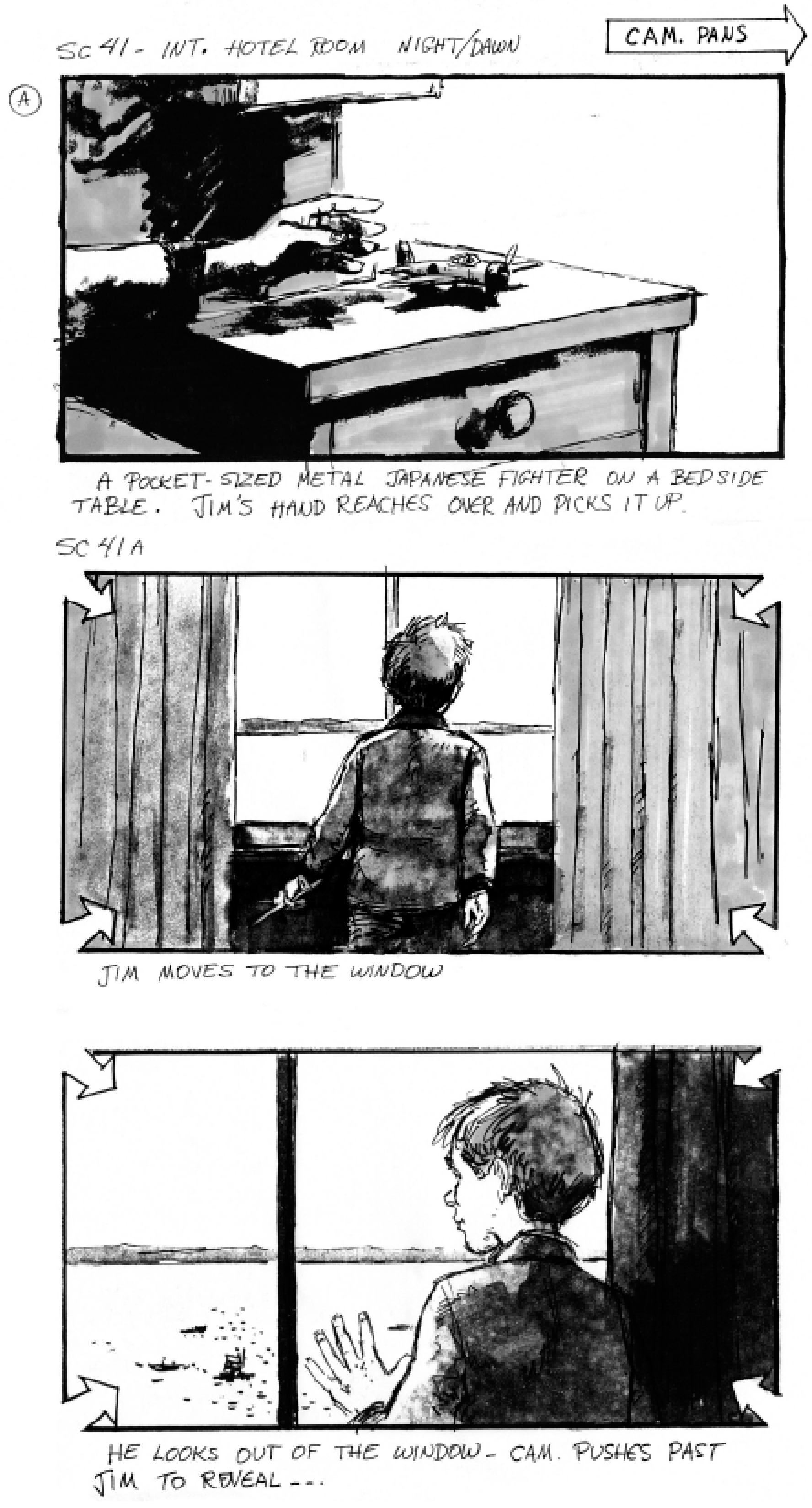
Here is Tom Stoppard's adaptation of the same scene from the novel. The scene opens in Jim's hotel room. This time Jim is asleep. He is awakened at dawn by the sound of a close flying plane. He gets out of bed and goes to the window.

The prolonged action of the Japanese marines boarding ships that appears in the novel is condensed in the screenplay to Jim's watching the Japanese gunboat moving in the river. He backs away from the window and turns on the bedside light. An exterior shot of the hotel lets us see the light in the window of the generally dark hotel.

the last few pages the pan We cut to a short time later and Jim is dressed in school clothes. He picks up a *Latin Primer*, which is near a small toy plane on a table alongside the bed, but is soon attracted to the action outside the window. The Japanese gunboat in the middle of the river is sending a message to another boat with a signal light. Jim returns to his bedside and picks up a flashlight. Cut to a new shot outside the hotel. This is a wide shot of the hotel, the river, and the gunboats. In the dim predawn light, Jim's flashlight blinks in the window of his hotel room. After a moment of signaling, the gunboat cannons roar and Jim's room is lit up with a brilliant flash of light. Jim falls backward. Within seconds, Jim's father rushes in calling his name.

```
                    JIM
    I didn't mean it!  It was a joke!
```

As it turns out the first and revised third drafts of the screenplay are essentially identical. We can compare this with the storyboard, which is a fairly straightforward staging of the screenplay. The major changes, the ones that make the scene truly cinematic, are added in the film. Beginning below is a condensed version of the storyboard.



SC 41 - INT. HOTEL ROOM NIGHT/DAWN

CAM. PANS

Ⓐ

A POCKET-SIZED METAL JAPANESE FIGHTER ON A BEDSIDE TABLE. JIM'S HAND REACHES OVER AND PICKS IT UP.

SC 41 A

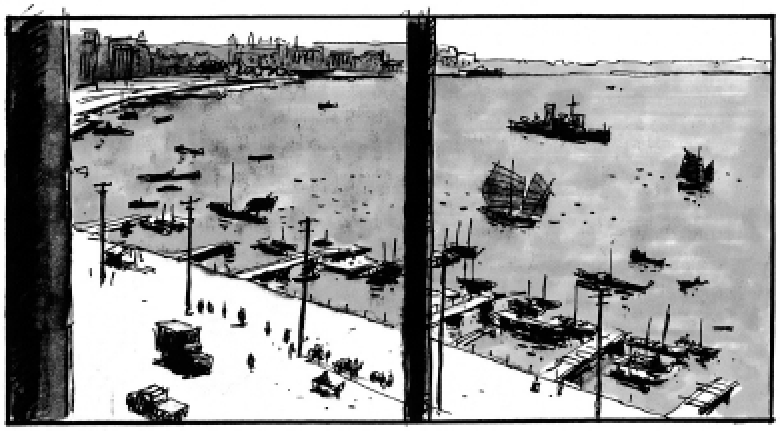
JIM MOVES TO THE WINDOW

HE LOOKS OUT OF THE WINDOW - CAM. PUSHES PAST JIM TO REVEAL ---

David Jonas's storyboard for *Empire of the Sun*.

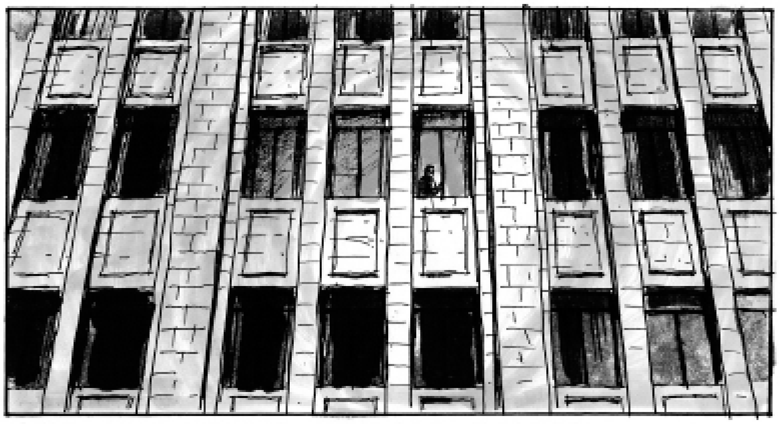
SC 42

Ⓓ

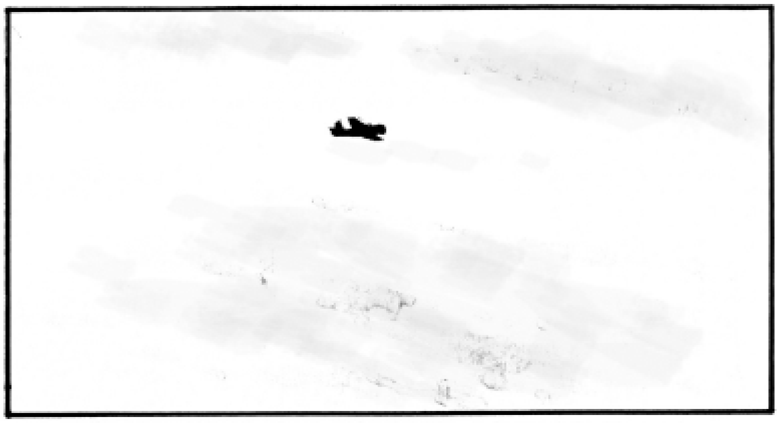


JIM'S VIEW OF THE RIVER. A FEW BOATS ARE MOVING - A LITTLE EARLY MORNING TRAFFIC ON THE BUND - A FEW RICKSHAWS ETC. CUT TO

SC 43 EXT. CATHAY HOTEL DAWN/DARK

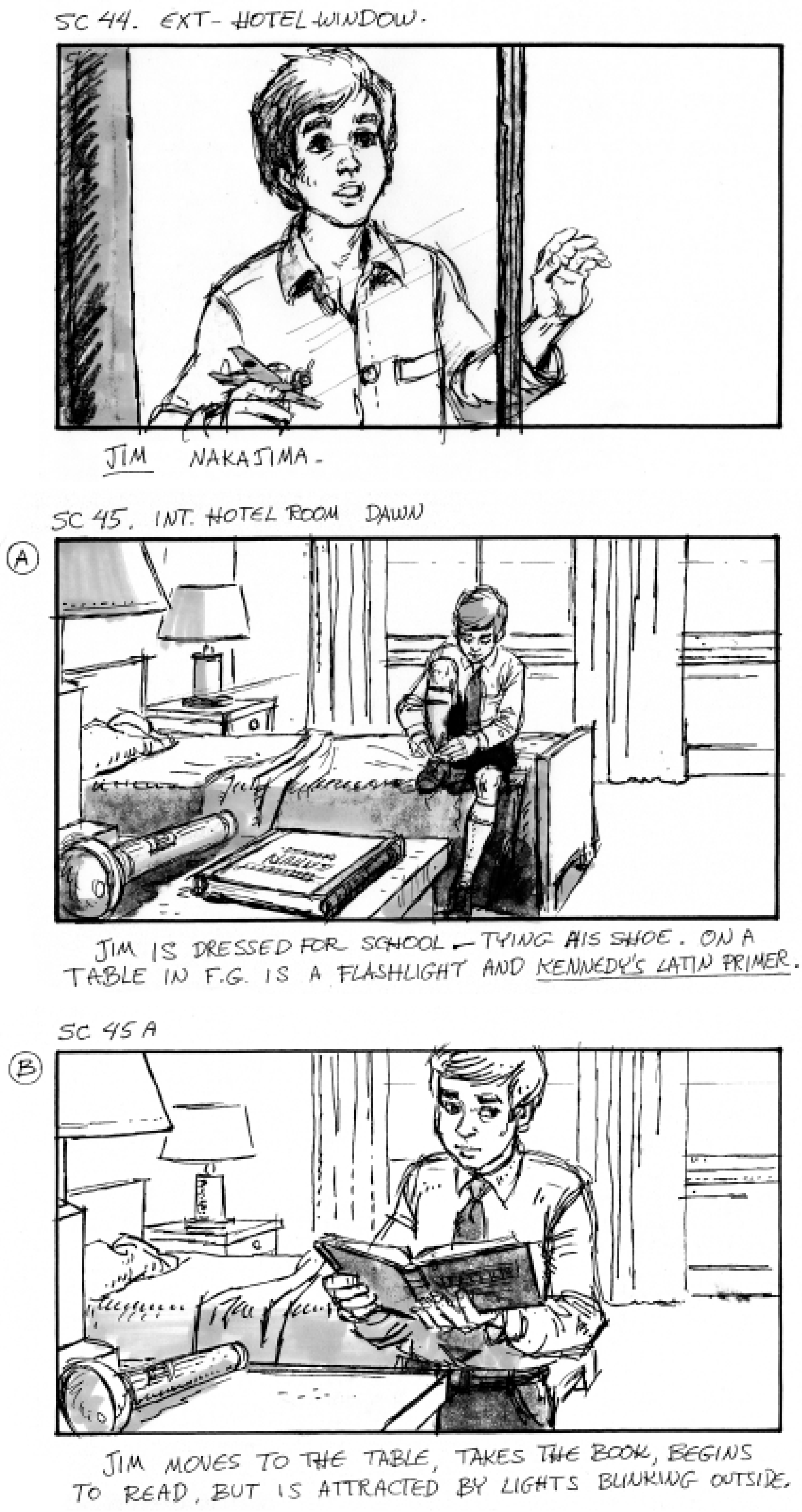


JIM CAN BE SEEN LOOKING OUT OF THE WINDOW. WE CAN HEAR THE SOUND OF A PLANE.

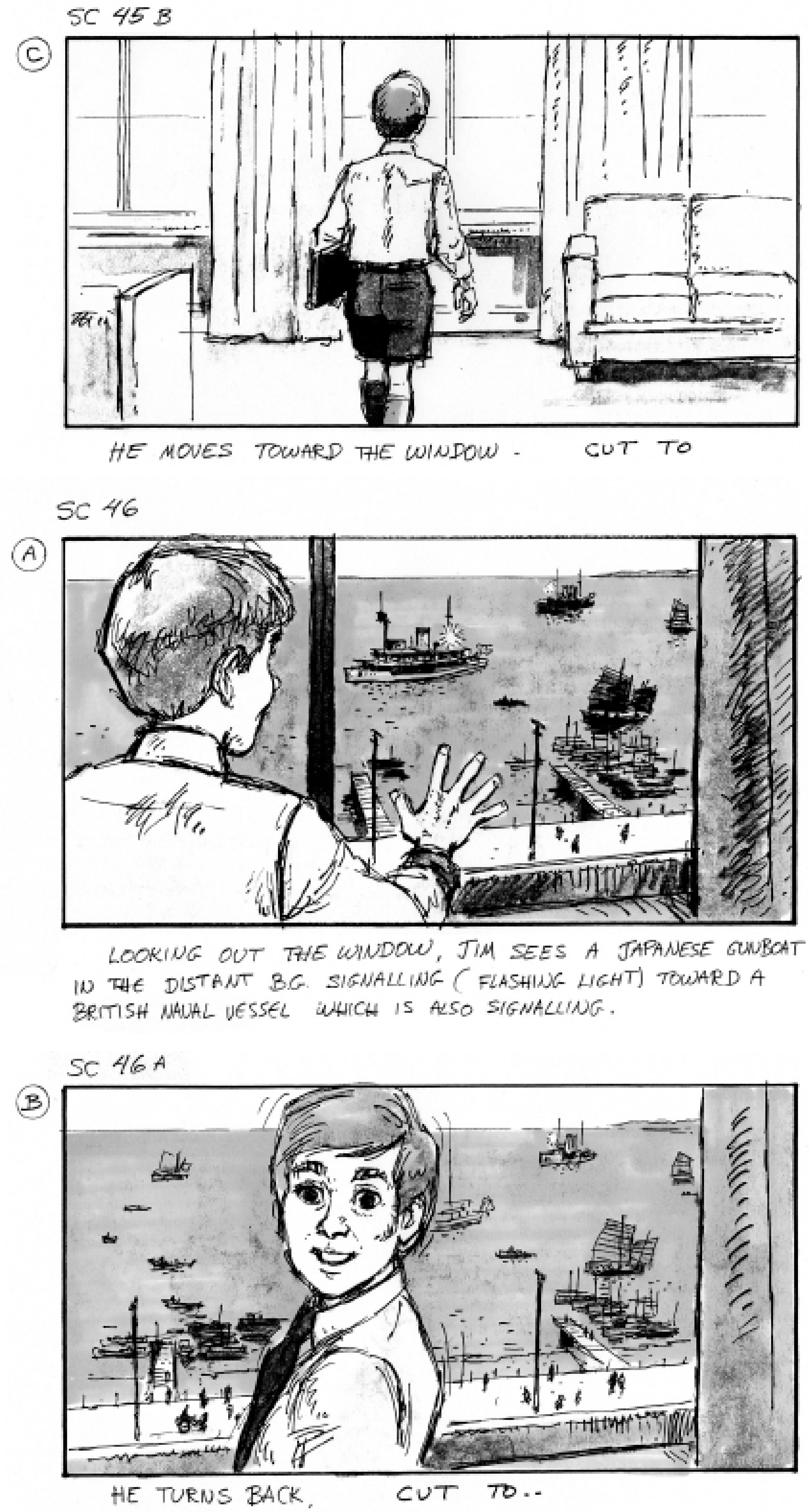


JIM'S POV - A JAPANESE FIGHTER CUT TO --

David Jonas's storyboard for *Empire of the Sun*.


SC 44. EXT- HOTEL WINDOW.
JIM NAKAJIMA.
SC 45. INT. HOTEL ROOM DAWN
A
JIM IS DRESSED FOR SCHOOL – TYING HIS SHOE. ON A TABLE IN F.G. IS A FLASHLIGHT AND KENNEDY'S LATIN PRIMER.
SC 45A
B
JIM MOVES TO THE TABLE, TAKES THE BOOK, BEGINS TO READ, BUT IS ATTRACTED BY LIGHTS BLINKING OUTSIDE.

David Jonas's storyboard for *Empire of the Sun*.

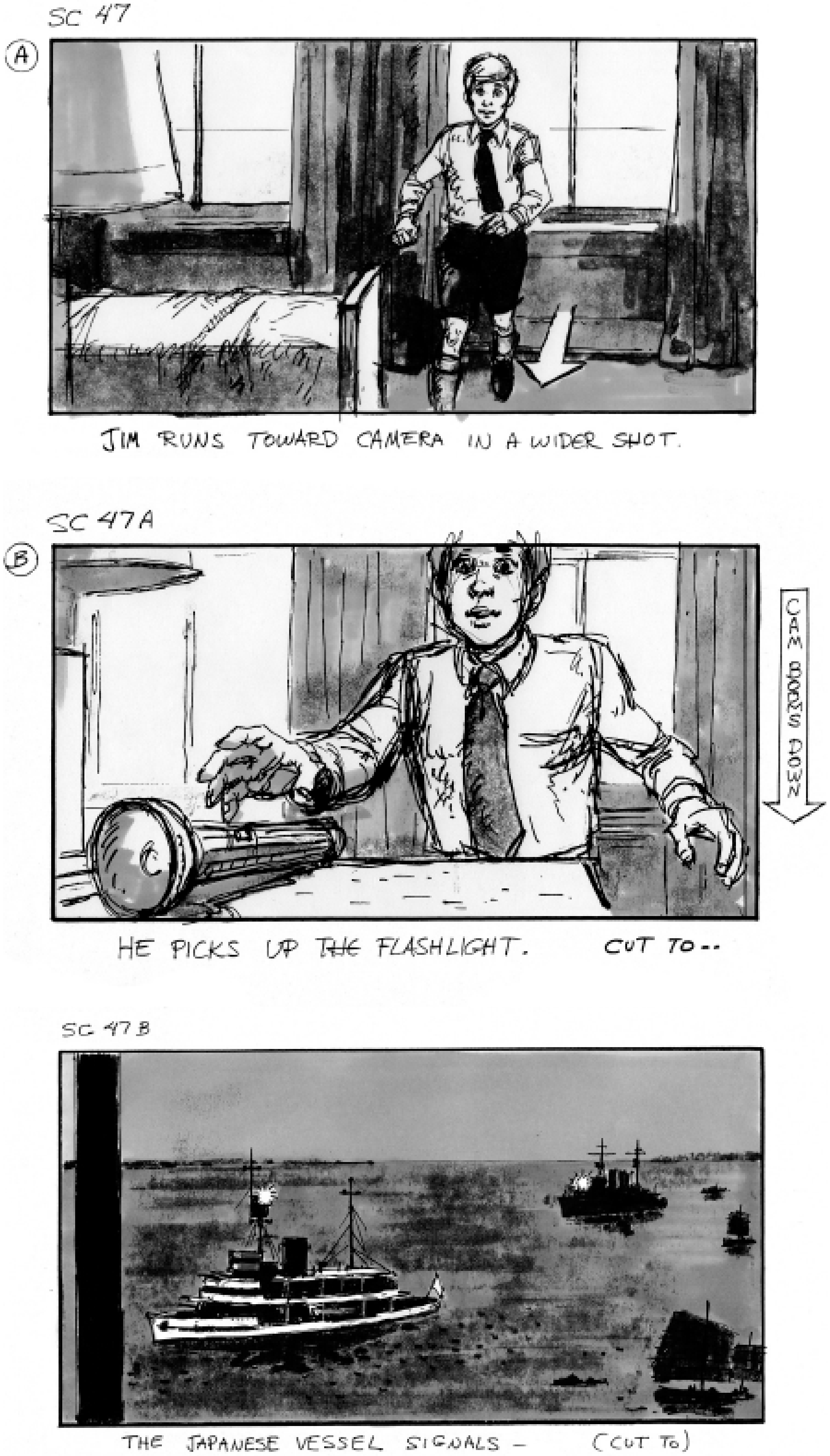


HE MOVES TOWARD THE WINDOW - CUT TO

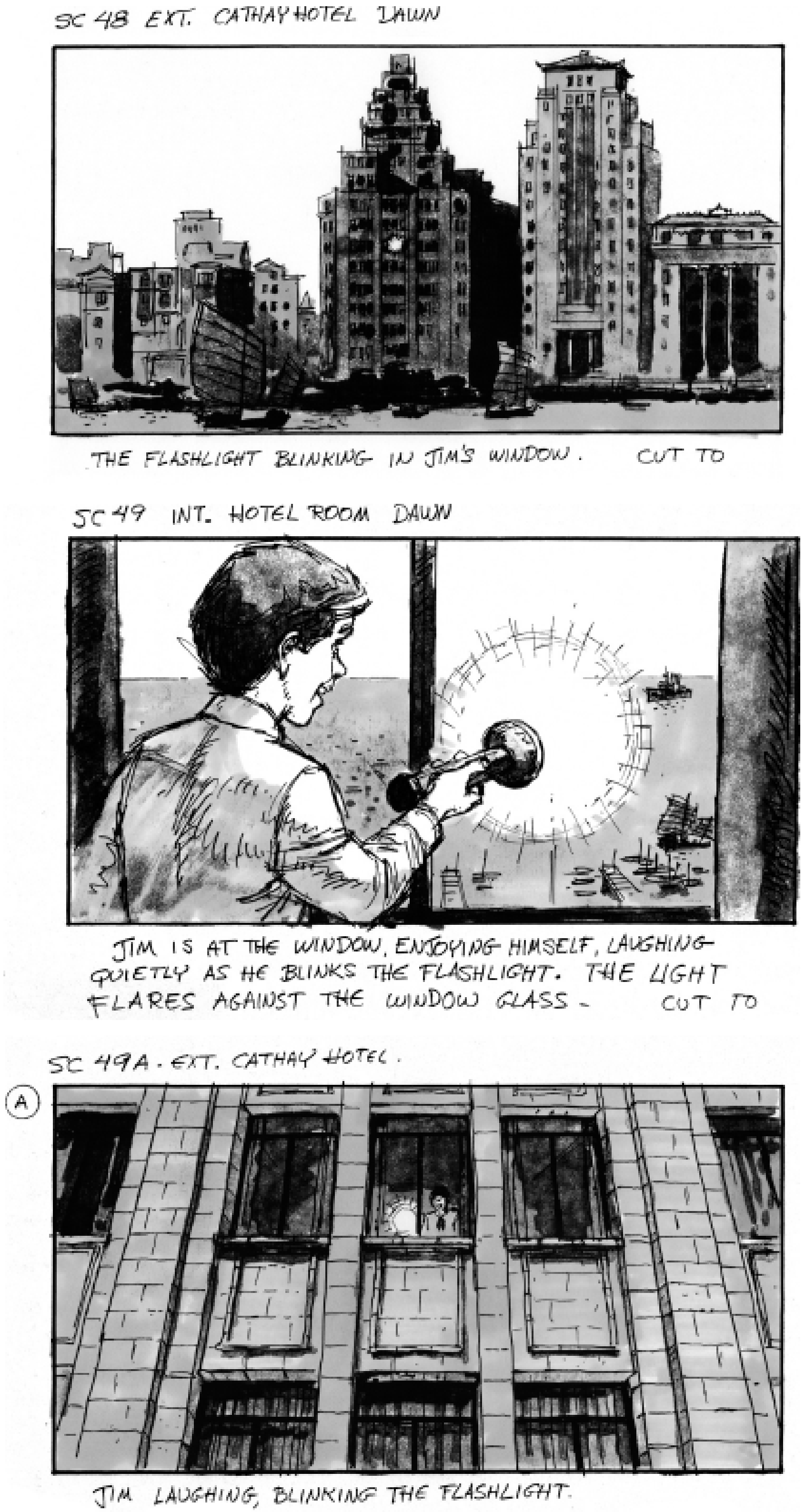
LOOKING OUT THE WINDOW, JIM SEES A JAPANESE GUNBOAT IN THE DISTANT B.G. SIGNALLING (FLASHING LIGHT) TOWARD A BRITISH NAVAL VESSEL WHICH IS ALSO SIGNALLING.

HE TURNS BACK, CUT TO..

David Jonas’s storyboard for *Empire of the Sun*.


SC 47
A
JIM RUNS TOWARD CAMERA IN A WIDER SHOT.
SC 47A
B
CAM BOOMS DOWN
HE PICKS UP THE FLASHLIGHT. CUT TO--
SC 47B
THE JAPANESE VESSEL SIGNALS - (CUT TO)

David Jonas’s storyboard for *Empire of the Sun*.



SC 48 EXT. CATHAY HOTEL DAWN

THE FLASHLIGHT BLINKING IN JIM'S WINDOW. CUT TO

SC 49 INT. HOTEL ROOM DAWN

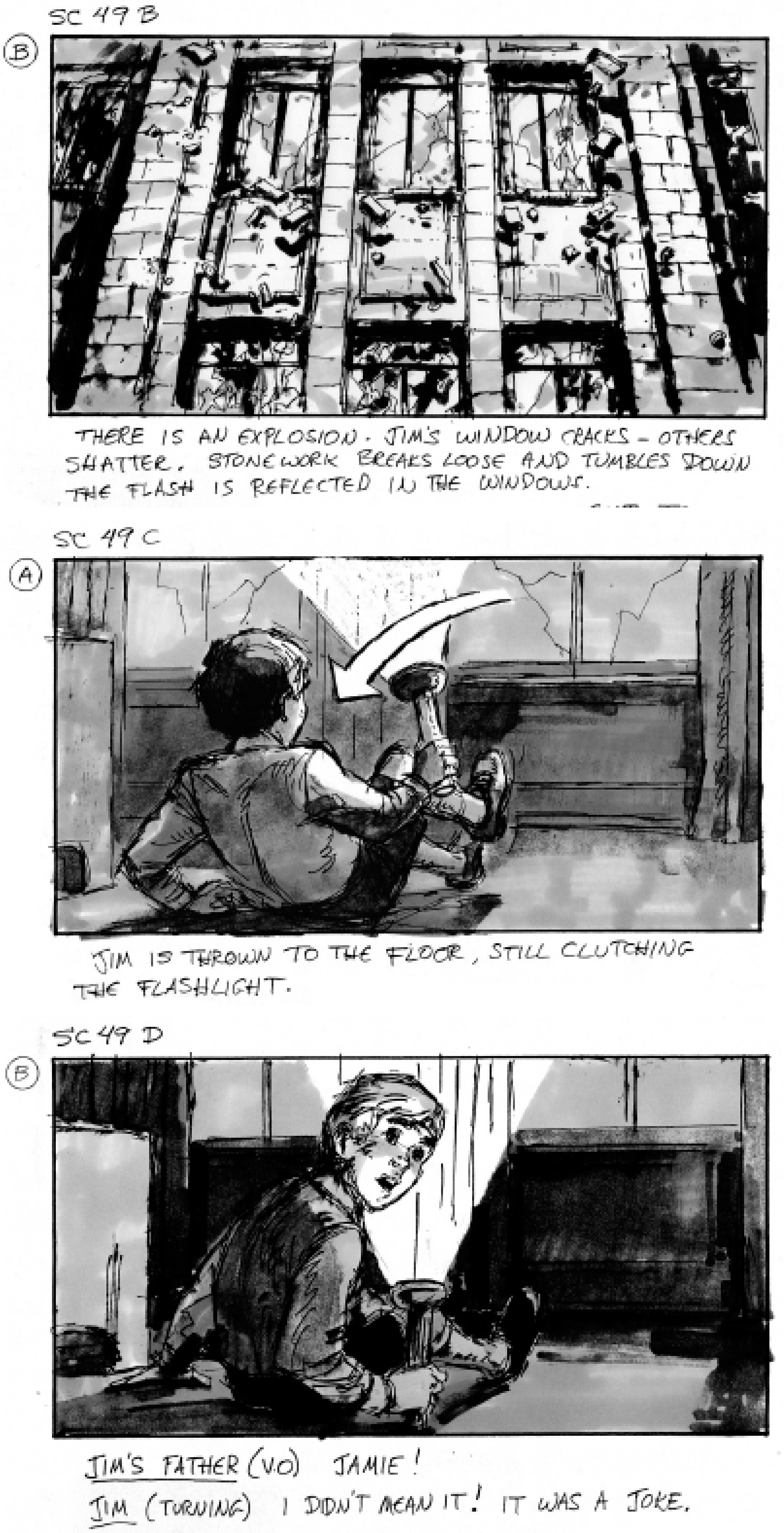
JIM IS AT THE WINDOW, ENJOYING HIMSELF, LAUGHING QUIETLY AS HE BLINKS THE FLASHLIGHT. THE LIGHT FLARES AGAINST THE WINDOW GLASS. CUT TO

SC 49A. EXT. CATHAY HOTEL.

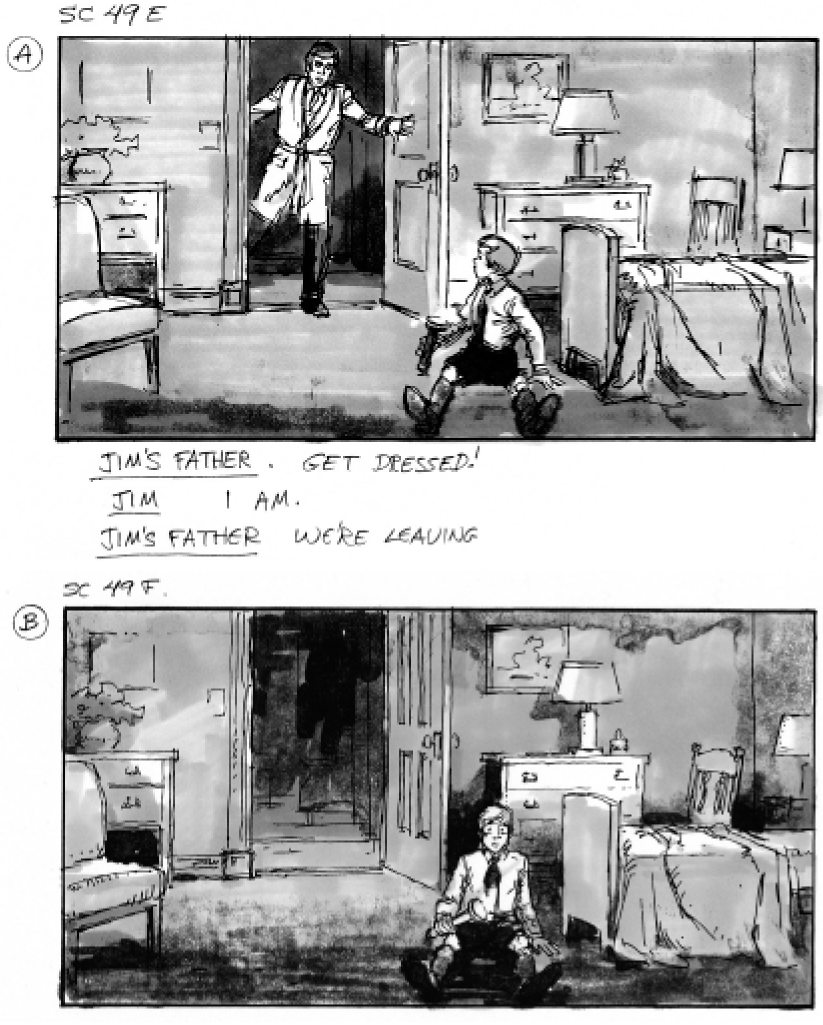
Ⓐ

JIM LAUGHING, BLINKING THE FLASHLIGHT.

David Jonas's storyboard for *Empire of the Sun*.


SC 49 B
B
THERE IS AN EXPLOSION. JIM'S WINDOW CRACKS – OTHERS SHATTER. STONEWORK BREAKS LOOSE AND TUMBLES DOWN THE FLASH IS REFLECTED IN THE WINDOWS.
SC 49 C
A
JIM IS THROWN TO THE FLOOR, STILL CLUTCHING THE FLASHLIGHT.
SC 49 D
B
JIM'S FATHER (V.O) JAMIE!
JIM (TURNING) I DIDN'T MEAN IT! IT WAS A JOKE.

David Jonas's storyboard for *Empire of the Sun*.


SC 49 E
A
JIM'S FATHER . GET DRESSED!
JIM I AM.
JIM'S FATHER WE'RE LEAVING
SC 49 F.
B

David Jonas’s storyboard for *Empire of the Sun*.

Now that we have looked at all the sources for the scene — the novel, screenplay, and storyboard — we can consider how the scene was actually shot.

The Sequence as Filmed

The scene opens with various shots of the Shanghai waterfront at dawn. Cut to the shadow of a plane on the ceiling of Jim’s darkened hotel room. The camera pans with the shadow made by a toy plane Jim holds in the beam of his flashlight. Continue the pan down the wall and over to Jim, who is dressed and lying in bed. The mournful sound of a ship’s horn draws Jim’s attention to the window overlooking the river.

New angle at the window with Jim. He watches the Japanese gunboat signaling the shore with a light.

Cut to three exterior medium shots of the Japanese crewman sending signals.

Cut to a wide shot of the river, the hotel, and the gunboat in the background. In this shot, we see the two Japanese ships signaling back and forth. Suddenly a third light begins signaling in one of the upper floor hotel windows.

Cut to Jim's hotel room with him signaling with his flashlight.

We can pause here to review how the cinematic structure evolves. First, there is the use of the spotlight and the toy plane. Spielberg has condensed two story elements into a single image that graphically moves us to Jim. It's a choice evocation of childhood and it introduces the flashlight and the toy plane, which will become important in later scenes.

Another visual decision substitutes the flashlight for the semaphore signals described in the novel for the obvious reason that the light can be seen from a distance. This opens up new possibilities for shots. It is also far more plausible that Jim would imagine that he had inadvertently sent some provocative signal to the Japanese gunboat with the flashlight than with semaphores.

In the filmed sequence, unlike the screenplay and the storyboard, we never see Jim return from the window to pick up the flashlight. By introducing the flashlight in the opening shot with the toy plane, it is unnecessary to show Jim taking it from the nightstand. By omitting the in-between shots of Jim picking the flashlight up and going to the window, the scene is streamlined and the audience is surprised (but not confused) when Jim's signal light appears above the Japanese signal in the wide shot of the river.

Spielberg adds a final variation on the storyboard in the filmed staging. When Jim is startled by the gun blast and throws himself backwards onto the floor, the camera pans with him but leaves him in midair, panning quickly to record the moment he hits the ground in the reflection of three standing mirrors that are connected by hinges. One of the panels shaken by the blast swings inward and frames the doorway in time for us to see his father enter the room. Jim is reflected in two of the mirrors and his father is reflected in a third. In this way, three shots are combined into one. This is so adroitly executed that the effect is all but invisible.

Empire used the talents of two production illustrators, David Jonas and art director Ed Verreaux, who worked on the project for nearly a year. Using photographs shot in Shanghai, the illustrators worked at the art department in Spielberg's Amblin Entertainment complex in Universal City. Like many of the production illustrators I spoke with, Jonas began working in production illustration in the Disney animation department, honing his drafting and storytelling skills before moving to live action.

The *Empire of the Sun* boards, originally drawn to fill an 8 1/2 × 11 inch page, are exceptionally detailed and show Jonas's wonderful compositional sense and figure drawing. This level of execution is as complex as storyboard illustration ever becomes, particularly since nearly every scene of the movie was illustrated with the same craftsmanship. For today's complex action pictures, there are as many as 5 or 6 storyboard artists and several more concept artists.

Seeking a Career in Production Illustration

Storyboarding is a highly specialized skill offering little of the personal recognition artists in other fields can expect. To a great extent, production illustrators are hired to work out someone else's ideas and are then under great pressure to complete the work in a short time. For some, the collaboration with a good production designer and director and the opportunity to see their sketches turned into a great movie is sufficient reward. In today's visual marketplace and an era when online portfolios can reach thousands of potential assignments, a production illustrator can work in game design, TV, and motion pictures, web toons, book illustration, and graphic novels to stay busy. It's much easier today to mix independent work and fulltime employment at a studio than ever before.

Instruction

There are many, many sources of information online for traditional and digital art training. YouTube has thousands of free tutorials by artists for artists many of which will lead to a site with subscription-based courses.

There are many online art schools both with and without credit or certificate programs. Lynda.com, Pluralsight, Video Copilot, Udemy, and many, many other sites offer courses in digital software as well as specific art or visual-effects skills such as figure drawing or perspective. Many traditional art schools now offer degree programs online. Storyboard courses are available, but with fewer options than the broader category of digital illustration. Even if you are interested in production illustration for live action, you will probably have better luck finding storyboard instruction at an animation school. Storyboarding is essential in animation; in live action it's not.

The good news is that traditional training at a fine arts or commercial art school is still a very good foundation for production designers, art directors, and production illustrators. Many art schools offer courses in advertising art, which include television commercial storyboarding in the curriculum. However, most art schools tend to focus on foundational drawing and painting. Though drawing skill is important, a production illustrator is primarily a film designer whose concern is really cinematography and editing. Courses in film history, technique, and basic photography are, therefore, a necessity no matter how strong your illustration skills are.

Unions

There used to be two California organizations to specifically represent storyboard illustrators. The first was the Illustrators and Matte Artists Local 790 IATSE (International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees), whose jurisdiction included live-action storyboard art and production illustration. The second union was the Motion Picture Screen Cartoonists Local 839, also affiliated with the IATSE, but this union only represented animators. In 2008, the two unions were merged into Local 800 of the Art Directors Guild that only a few years earlier had merged with the Scenic, Title and Graphic Artists union to form the Art Directors Guild & Scenic, Title and Graphic Artists.

Today, the craft unions in the motion-picture industry exert far less control than in the past, particularly since there are so many independently produced nonunion pictures made outside of Los Angeles. While the cost of making a picture goes up much faster than the rate of inflation, the main reason why even small motion pictures cost millions of dollars is due to the extraordinary salaries of producers, directors, and stars, along with the expense of marketing a picture. Comparatively speaking, the cost of skilled union personnel is a bargain.

Further information on the Art Directors Guild can be reached here:

The Art Directors Guild
11969 Ventura Boulevard, 2nd Floor
Studio City, CA 91604
T (818) 762-9995
https://www.adg.org

4 Visualization: Tools and Techniques

With only a few exceptions, filmmaking tools today are digital. In previs, the most important exceptions are pencil and paper. Sketching by hand is still remarkably efficient at a time when the Wacom tablet and your image editing software of choice are standard issue for animators, visual-effects artists, and production artists.

Drawing

There are many digital sketch tools out there and more coming all the time. The iPad and its competitors are upping the features as prices fall. There are drawing slates and there are slate/monitors. Slates are basically pen inputs for computers. You draw on a flat drawing surface while watching the results on your computer screen. Slate/monitors like the Wacom Cintiq let you draw directly on a computer screen optimized for drawing. Slates (without the monitor) are down to less than $100 and this is a simple stylus and a drawing surface in the 6–8 inch size range with larger surfaces coming in around $300–$400. Slate/monitors are more expensive, but quite frankly, they are the future and great for tracing or retouching photos and can be found in the $500–$1,000 range. In Hollywood, most of the storyboard and sketch artists have moved to digital drawing. Fortunately, in the past few years, there has been an explosion of new drawing hardware and apps offering new features at low prices.

Wacom Tablet
Image Courtesy of: Wacom Co., Ltd.

Drawing and Painting Software

Software options for digital drawing and painting begin with the usual suspects, Adobe Photoshop and Corel Painter, but several newer programs are offering features that give the status quo a run for its money. Smith Micro's Moho is drawing/animation software while Clip Studio PAINT EX is a general drawing and painting tool optimized for comic book art. Both are tops in their class. We'll get back to Smith Micro in the 3D software section. There's also Autodesk Sketchbook Pro, Rebelle 2 (digital natural media painting), ArtRage, Black Ink (Windows only), PaintTool SAI (Windows only), Toon Boom (also widely used in Hollywood animation studios), and Mischief.

Asset-Driven Design

There are billions of digital pictures, models, design templates, and video and audio samples available online. Much of it is free. There's no reason to create everything from scratch because many of the pictures/sound/audio you use will not be seen in the final movie. This is good, because pre-made assets can be used by anybody and you don't want some design element of your movie showing up on YouTube before your movie opens. Fortunately, you don't see the blueprint for a building; you see the building. Art for pre-production is used until the movie is made; after that, it's disposable.

You can also create your own library of pre-made assets. Why not keep a folder of wide/medium/close-up shots on your computer with screen captures or shots downloaded from your favorite movies? Create categories for close-ups, shots, reverse shot patterns, medium shots, two-shots, singles, etc. Sergio Leone close-ups will not be the same as Christopher Nolan close-ups. You can trace them or use them directly in storyboards to show the production designer or art director how you envision the scene. This is all asset-driven design, a growing trend in the visual arts. Numerous commercial sites sell pre-created art templates for use in After Effects, Photoshop, and many other programs including 3D animation applications. The quantity of assets is growing exponentially, because there are many art marketplaces online offering the design aids of a huge number of digital artists. Every illustrator or photographer or 3D modeler is able to upload work to sell online in a wide range of styles. Marketplaces often offer tutorials free and paid for techniques related to their assets.

Premade assets are hugely helpful for art reference, but there are other solutions as well to help with your drawing. For example, most artists keep a camera or a small hand mirror handy so they can pose for their own art. An iPhone with a tripod works fine and is easily transferred to your hard drive. If you draw on your iPad and also use the built-in camera, you skip the need to import. That's a cool workflow.

When you start to storyboard your movie, write a shot list or indicate directly in the script where close-ups and medium shots will be used. The idea is to have reference for thumbnail drawings, or photoboards.

While digital photos eliminate the need to draw, you now need actors, friends, or interested bystanders to be in your photos. One thing worth keeping in mind about digital photography and videography: It’s very easy to shoot tons of material since digital media is free. But your time is anything but free when have you go through hundreds of photos and hours of video. If you have the time, that’s fine, but trying to find the right shot and sequence of shots requires some discipline if you are working within a budget. The solution is to be organized. Get in the habit of using sensible naming conventions and a folder hierarchy that is as simple as possible.

Naming conventions: Be consistent. This will be a huge help when you’re performing searches on your computer. A month after you’ve storyboarded a scene consisting of many folders, chances are you will have forgotten where things are unless you file intelligently. Here’s the basic workflow.

- Add pictures and notes in the margins of the screenplay
- Create a shot list
- Make list of assets needed (cars, houses, locations, people, etc.)
- Find the needed assets online
- Organize the assets in folders
- Use the assets to make your storyboard or your photoboard.

Presentation

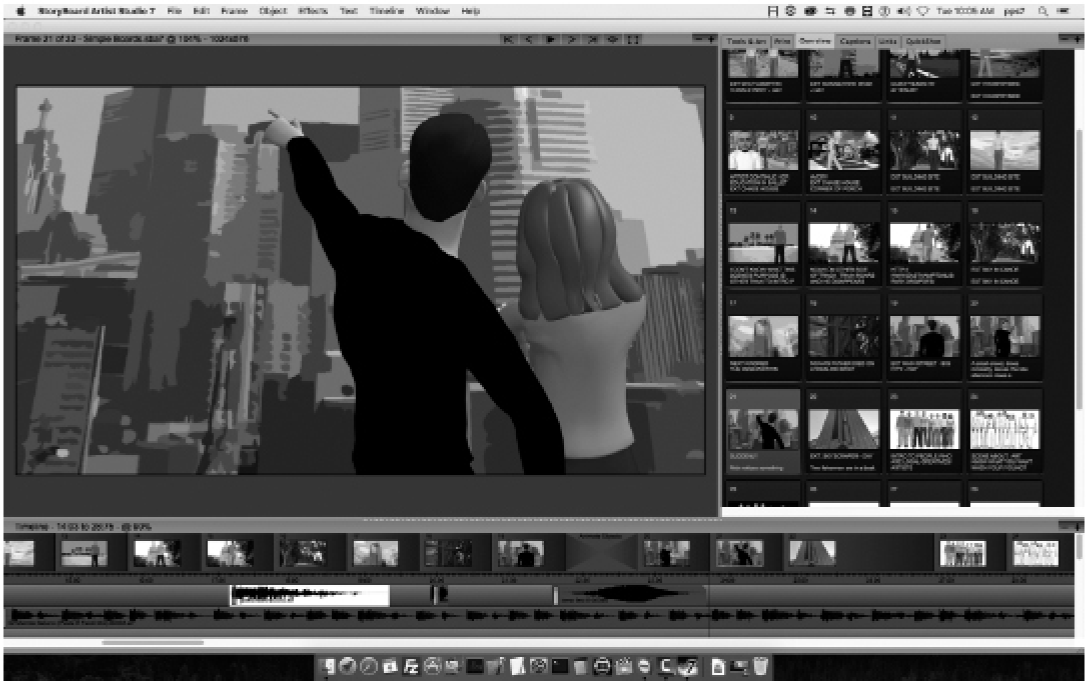
So now you have 100 storyboard panels with drawn art, some photos, and images downloaded from the Internet. Fine. What’s the best way to show it to people? There are many options. For one, Layers in Photoshop. You click the layers on and off in the stack to reveal the storyboard panels sequentially or you can do a similar process using a .pdf file or PowerPoint. You can narrate and advance through the images at your own pace. This is basically a slideshow. The next step up in sophistication is a slideshow plus motion, transitions, music, and sound. Avid, Final Cut Pro, Premiere, After Effects, iMovie, and similar editing software have more than enough features to make a professional presentation.

Sometimes you will need to print out your boards. You can set this up yourself in Photoshop or download any of dozens of free templates available online. Software like Toon Boom and Moho have templates built in. Nowadays, all work is shared on the Web so most people are accustomed to seeing art on a LED screen. For color art, a digital monitor is far more vibrant than an ink-jet print viewed under typical interior lighting.

LED panels are only getting lighter and brighter and this is the optimal way to show your artwork at its best. iPad and its competitors are also a great way to show a production art with music and sound effects.

Dedicated Storyboard Programs

Several of the drawing programs already mentioned have tools for animation design, but are also general use drawing and painting programs, everything needed to create 2D animation. There are a few programs, however, explicitly aimed at filmmakers interested in creating their own storyboards and animatics for live action. There are both 2D and 3D offerings. PowerProduction Software has been around the longest and has several storyboarding products including their flagship product StoryBoard Artist Studio Edition. This is a very capable software program that is a drawing environment but also sports a powerful asset-based approach. That means the program comes with hundreds of 2D characters, sets, and props that can be rotated and easily scaled and positioned in the frame. There are also dozens of pre-staged arrangements of characters that ship with the product. These are layered onto a canvas over any of hundreds of common interior and exterior locations. It took quite a few years for this program to have sufficient assets to make this work, but recently the database has grown impressively. What you won’t get from the art is the cohesive art direction or specific lighting you would get from an artist, but for previewing scenes with everything at your fingertips, Storyboard Artist Studio has little competition. Lastly, and very importantly, the program provides a timeline editor with effects, transitions, and full sound support. Overall, a very capable all-in-one 2D previs environment.



Storyboard Artist Software is a 2D digital previs program that includes a timeline editor.

3D Previsualization

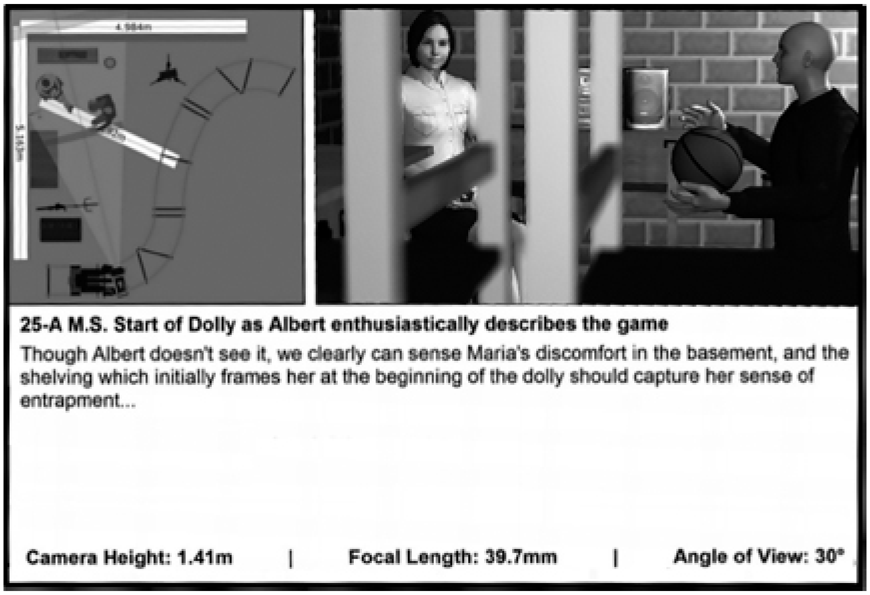
This is the major leagues for film design. At the high end, you have dedicated previs service providers in Hollywood, and many VFX studios around the world now offer this service as well. But staying in the DIY arena, the top software for 3D is the same list we've had for a couple of decades: Autodesk Maya and 3D Studio, Cinema 4D, Houdini, open-source Blender, and LightWave supplemented by specialty tools such as Z-Brush. The animation created in 3D then moves into a compositing program such as Nuke or After Effects and then into an editing program such as Avid, Final Cut Pro, Premiere, or even iMovie. These are all relatively complex tools to learn with too much technical overhead for most filmmakers who want to visualize their movies, but do not expect a career in visual effects for animation. Having said that, there are many 3D-savvy filmmakers out there for whom 3D is their sketchbook. Simplified 3D tools for directors with little training in 3D software include iClone and FrameForge, and less film-specific software Poser and DAZ Studio, both essentially 3D illustration tools.

Poser, the program created by Larry Weinstein, was supposed to be a digital mannequin for artists back in 1995 and ended up becoming the prototype for every previs product that followed. Poser evolved into a favored tool because it pioneered asset-driven software. This meant that Poser mannequins could be customized and modified by Poser users. It wasn't long before a thriving marketplace for Poser artists to buy and sell original and modified models appeared. Trust the power of the crowd to generate tens of thousands of models, props, costumes, and locations in the space of 15 years. Poser is not optimized for previs, and is really designed for illustrators, but it remains a great asset for the previs process. Typically, CG savvy filmmakers will end up using several different programs and techniques in combination to design their movie.

Like Storyboard Artist Studio Edition, FrameForge has over several years of development and versions put together a very powerful previs tool. FrameForge was created from the beginning for filmmakers, and the tools are optimized for this purpose. There is a large asset base of characters, poses, props, and locations that ship with the product and other themed sets of characters and props. Scenes are in 3D and there is a full complement of the most commonly used professional virtual cameras and lenses, dollies, boom arms, cranes, and lighting gear. FrameForge allows you to create fully dimensional, animated scenes for previs and even includes the ability to reverse engineer the spatial information from a location photograph used for a background. This means your staging for a particular lens will be accurate for that particular photograph.

iClone is another powerful environment based on a game engine for realtime performance. This is an industry trend, but iClone is one of the most highly evolved real-time animation programs, with a character creator module and a growing database of assets. The look of iClone is generally more sophisticated than FrameForge because while it's easily adapted to previs, it's also capable of producing game-level cinematics.

FrameForge allows you to use actual cameras. In this scene, its the Arriflex D-21..



25-A M.S. Start of Dolly as Albert enthusiastically describes the game

Though Albert doesn't see it, we clearly can sense Maria's discomfort in the basement, and the shelving which initially frames her at the beginning of the dolly should capture her sense of entrapment...

Camera Height: 1.41m | **Focal Length: 39.7mm** | **Angle of View: 30°**

FrameForge has the ability to print out pages in many configurations. This one includes the lens information, a schematic of the set, and all the elements on the set, including the camera and dolly track.

DIY Previs

The above tools are empowering and exciting, but despite all the optimization and premade assets available, creating a 3D animated previs sequence or a PowerPoint slideshow of storyboards with music is a significant undertaking. Sometimes beat boards are as much as you'll need, depending on the way you direct. The more complex a shoot and rigid the schedule, the greater the need for a detailed previs. Of course, you don't have to do everything yourself. Finding a good CG generalist to set up all your shots in FrameForge is a smart choice if it's in the budget. You can then go in and quickly re-stage the scene by learning a few simple navigation commands. That way your time will be used making creative decisions and evaluating the previs not spending time on the busy work of setting up scenes.

The following previs for an elaborate action set piece from *Deadpool*, directed by Tim Miller, shows state-of-the-art previs with fluid character movement based on motion capture as well as key frame and physics simulations. When necessary, previs of this kind is based on real-world dimensions of objects and locations, and uses technically accurate cameras and lenses. This means that camera placement and logistical decisions based on the previs will be the same as if they were on location or on set. Previs at this level is costly and mainly used for action, fantasy, and sci-fi blockbusters. In fact, they are essentially low-budget animated movies except that they will never be released.

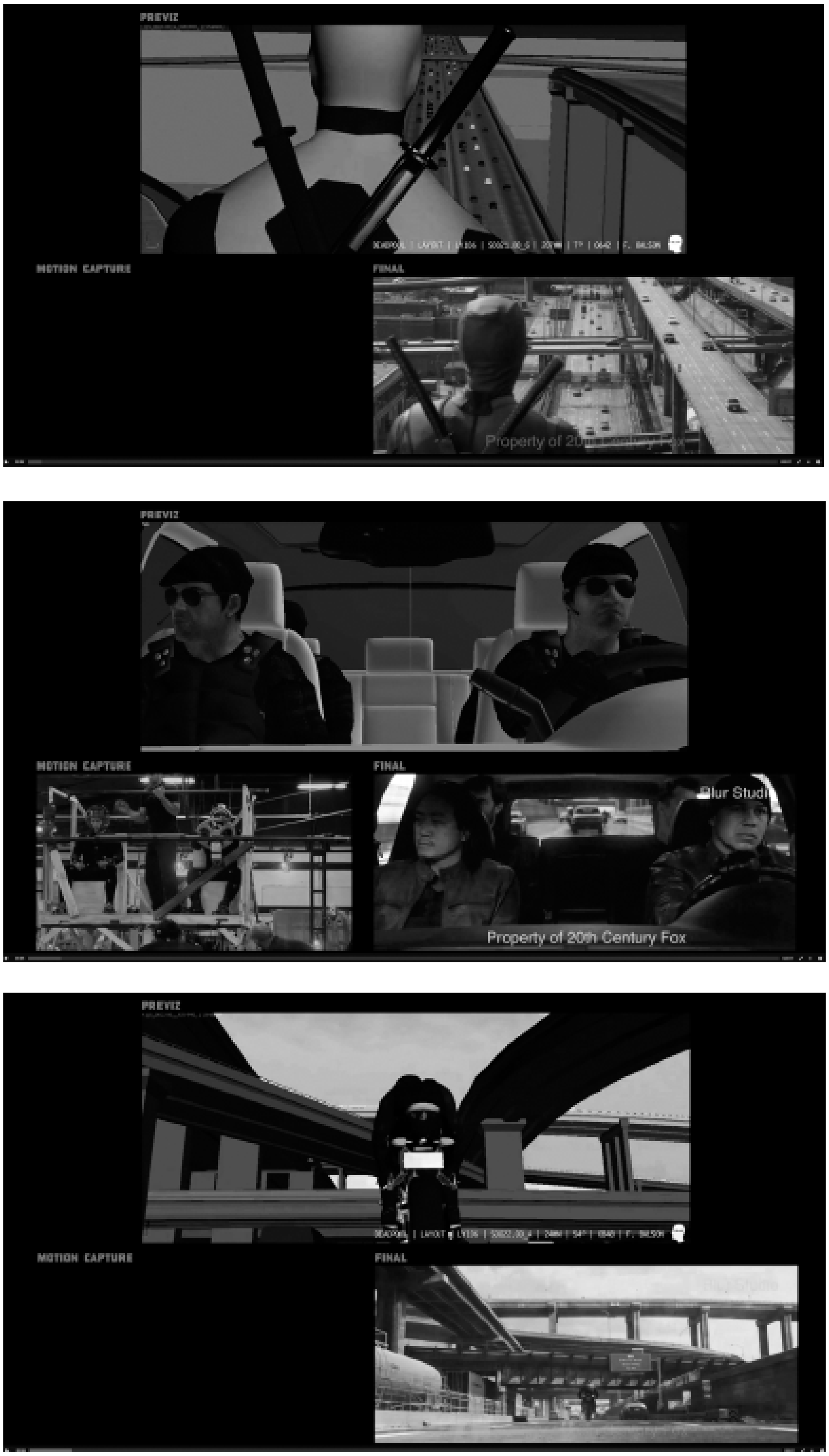
In the *Deadpool* previs, three panels appear within each frame. At the top is the animated previs. Lower left is the motion capture session to record the motion of the actors that will be imposed on the 3D characters in the previs. The live-action footage based on the sequence runs in the lower right panel.

Compositing

When you generate digital artwork, video, audio, and 3D animation for an animatic or previs you will combine these in an editing or compositing program to create the final presentation. Most nonlinear editing software have some compositing tools built in, but there are dedicated programs that are more powerful. The hands down winner is this category is Adobe After Effects, which is to compositing what Photoshop is to image editing. It's the gold standard. There are worthy competitors particularly on the high end for motion pictures, but for all-around usability, simplicity of use, and features, it's an extremely powerful environment for combining footage and creating VFX animation from scratch. Other excellent compositing software includes Black Magic Designs, Fusion, and Nuke from the Foundry. These last three products are typically used in a studio pipeline setting in visual effects studios although this is not a requirement.

Digital Video

It's now so easy to shoot HD video and import it into an editing program that sometimes it seems it would be easier to shoot video to record a scene for previs instead of going to the trouble of replicating reality with storyboards and 3D animation. This is true, but we're back to the actor, location, and logistics problem. Sure, you can shoot and edit on your iPhone, but even shooting run-and-gun style can be a lot more complicated than it sounds. Still, you can certainly previs many parts of most movies fairly easily with a smartphone. Shooting an entire movie to previs the actual movie is not practical, but it can be fine for selected dialogue scenes. A final animatic can be a mix of video, storyboards, and 3D animation. Whatever conveys the basic feel of the movie and important story points is a good solution.


PREVIZ
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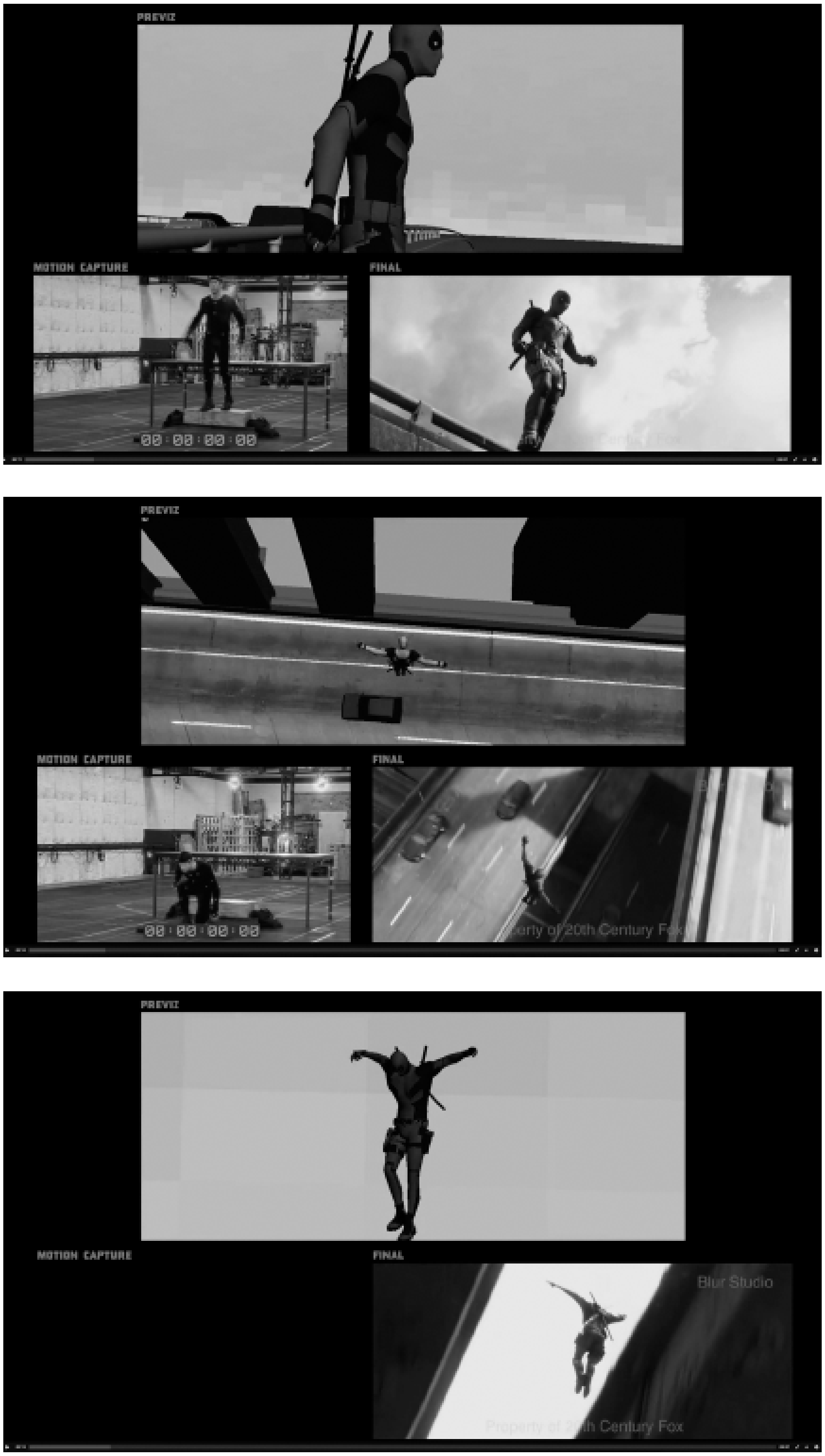
FINAL
Property of 20th Century Fox
PREVIZ
MOTION CAPTURE
FINAL
Blur Studio
Property of 20th Century Fox
PREVIZ
MOTION CAPTURE
FINAL

Blur Studios previs for *Deadpool*. ©2016 Twentieth Century Fox. All rights reserved.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PREVIZ
MOTION CAPTURE
FINAL
Blur Studio
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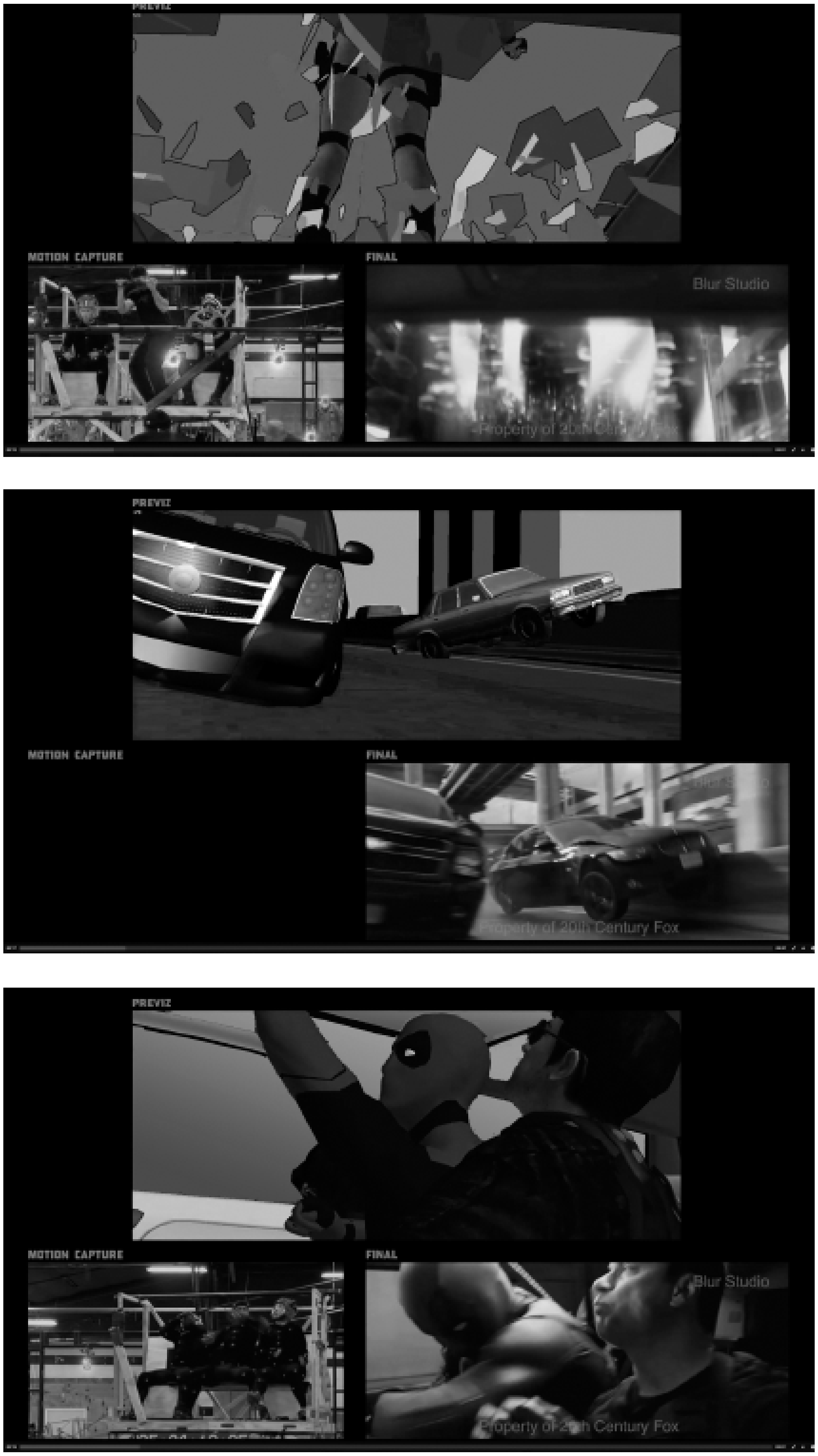
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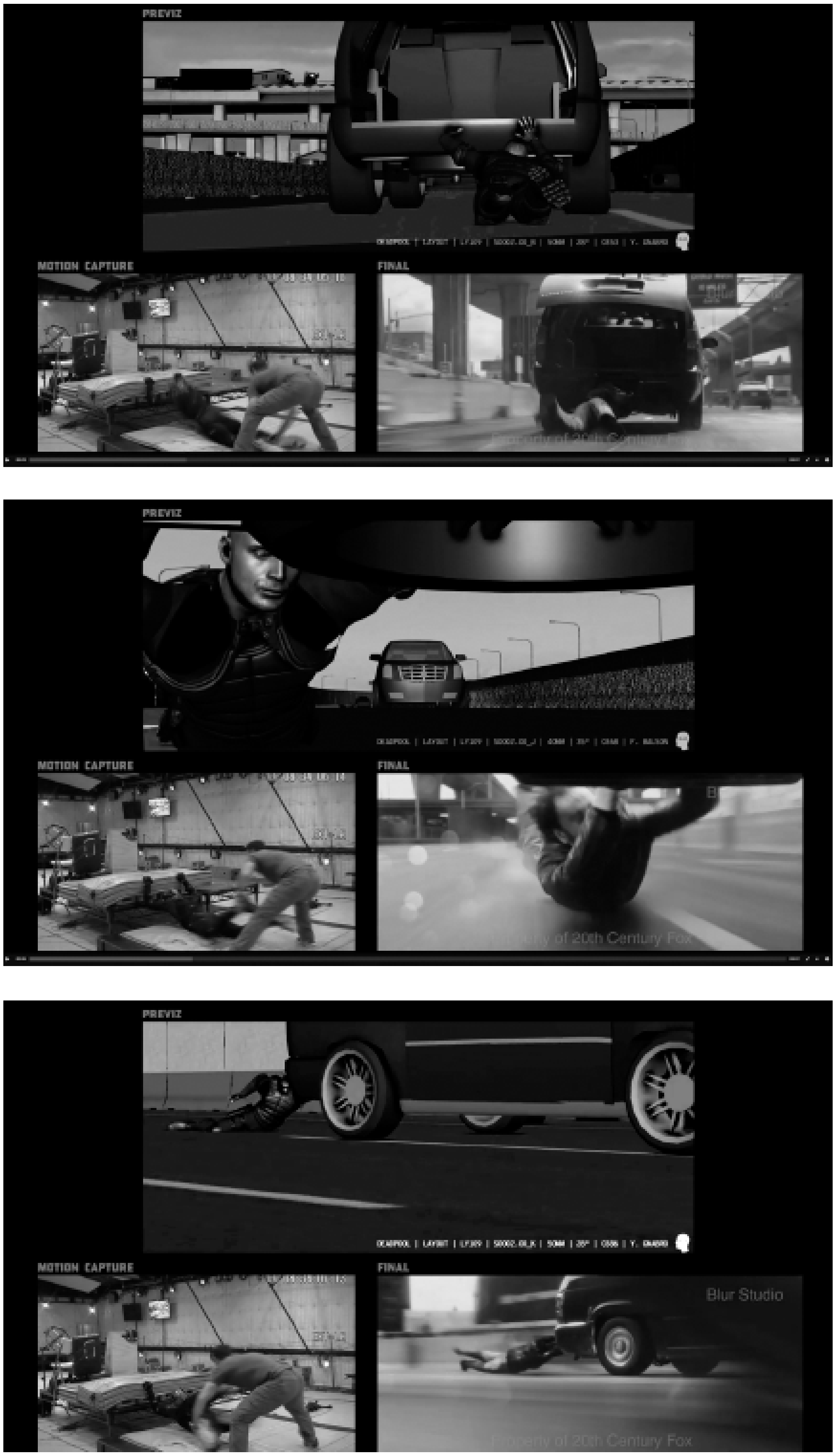
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Rip-O-Matics

YouTube and the current fashion of sampling art is flying high in Hollywood with rip-o-matics. These are typically trailers or teasers to sell a project to the studios, a distributor, or independent investors. Rip-o-matics are popular because every explosion, location, car chase, and dialogue sequence close to what your movie requires is probably online in an existing movie. This is remarkably true if not a bit disturbing. So it's possible to create a powerful, fully executed previs sequence or a trailer with footage liberally lifted from existing movies. A good editor can assemble a scene this way so a viewer would not easily know the source. Rip-o-matics are common sales tools nowadays, but the point here is that if you need shots of a Civil War battle and can't draw it or create it in 3D, chances are there's a shot close to what you need in some movie in the past 50 years, and it's on YouTube. Be careful to observe copyright laws for any material used.

Sound and Scores

Many filmmakers like to cut to music. Sound effects can be just as powerful — for example, watching a slideshow of beat boards for a scene in a city, a background sound effect of traffic makes the fictional world come alive. All this can be had for a price online and there are quite a few sites with free sound effects and musical selections. Most sound effects sites are indexed by subject with thousands of sounds in multiple formats for download. Most sounds are in the $2–$10 range and are easily previewed on the host site.

Analog

Digital is everywhere, but some analog tools and techniques are still available, and that's a good thing. Not every director needs to know the Adobe Creative Suite to make a movie, and there are many times when shooting a physical object in the real world or drawing them using real pencil and paper are faster and more fun than their virtual doppelgangers. Recently, a new class of anatomically accurate posable figures have arrived. Stickybones, Bandai S.H. Figuarts Body-kun, Dolk SFBT, and Figma make a variety of plastic figures to help artists draw the human figure from any angle. They're pricey, but enormously helpful for any storyboard artists.

There are also much less expensive toy soldiers that can be placed in miniature sets.

S.H. Figuarts makes posable human figures for artists.

Steven Spielberg using toy soldiers for previsualizing *Raiders of the Lost Ark*.

What's Next

The software and hardware mentioned above is always evolving and new versions of the software come out far more often than revisions to *Shot by Shot*, so there is now a *Shot by Shot* website, www.shotbyshotbook.com, where it's much easier to update information on digital tools and resources. The Web address is in the back of the book.

As for the future, previs and asset-based design will only grow as more and more individual artists offer premade customizable design templates for just about everything that fits in a frame or can be loaded up on YouTube. This is art in the age of digital reproduction.

The Future of Cameras

Movies, TV, stereoscopic presentations, VR, and the Internet are all part of the same rapidly evolving media landscape. All the above is data. Zeroes and ones. There is content creation software that mixes all of the above into one or two connected programs, but it's all just data that can be combined in many ways. That's why cameras are going to change. It's already happening.

The camera of the future will capture all the physical attributes of the location where an image is recorded and save it as metadata. That means the local weather conditions, orientation, and location of the camera in GPS terms; a light probe of the location; a light-field capture; and a 3D laser scan of the location for site re-creation. Initially this will be 2–3 devices, but will eventually end up in a single package. But even now, the several individual technologies necessary for the camera of the future are being prototyped, tested, and launched on Kickstarter as well as the labs of Sony, Nikon Canon, Panasonic, Red Digital, and many others.

For example, drones are now being used to fly around a location to make a 3D facsimile using computer vision. This provides a 3D location that is usable by the visual effects team. Even indoors, a robot drone could be programmed to fly a pattern around a set capturing the 3D coordinates of all the objects in a scene to be replicated later. This includes the surfaces of the objects in the scene such as the materials used to make tables, chairs, and carpets. Light probes are separate tools to record an HDRI sample of light in a scene, but this could be captured by the drones or fed from a handheld probe on the ground. Again, this is standard practice in visual-effects cinematography as a non-camera activity, but it will all be moving into the camera in the near future. The camera is the hub. The GPS coordinates, time of day, and air temperature will all be on the same camera report, which will be metadata recorded by the main camera.

Much of the world has been mapped from satellites and is available as GIS Geography. GIS is Geographic Information Systems. Like video and sound, the spatial coordinates and other information ends up as zeroes and ones that can be used with GPS positioning data and fed into 3D animation programs. Here the site and drone data captured for our future camera will be used to create a 3D reconstruction of the set or outdoor location in the scene. A model is made from this data and it can be matched back into the recorded footage.

The advantage of this is the ability to re-light a scene in postproduction. In the past, video and film were color and gamma corrected after principal photography. Digital Intermediates allow for much more control of color correction, but re-lighting a scene dimensionally is beyond the practical scope of traditional DI. However, with the full data capture described above post photography will become the color correction of the future, allowing for almost complete control over the image by including a great deal of 3D data. Most of what I've described is available today in separate workflows, but will eventually migrate to the camera as the ultimate data hub for live action, while the 3D animation software will serve the same function in animated and virtual production.

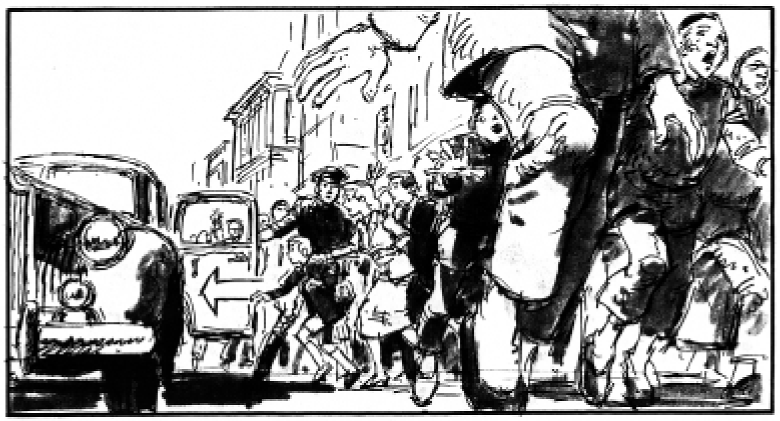
A recent development, Lytro, a light-field camera, captures all the traditional pictorial light values other cameras record, but adds the direction of light to the mix. This allows depth of field to be controlled after the image is captured. Lytro understands the depth of the image, making green screen unnecessary for effects since foreground objects that need to be isolated are understood to be in a different depth plane than the background. Currently, it is not a solution to replace existing cameras, but it shows how without film or even traditional digital sensor technology imagery can be captured with huge advances in image control.

An appropriate way to end this chapter is with an extended example of visualization using the storyboard from *Empire of the Sun*. This is a continuation of the panels by production illustrator David Jonas included in the last chapter. Apparent in every panel is Jonas's ability to depict just the precise moment in the action to convey the editing and dynamics of the shots.

It is clear, however, that the storyboard serves to convey Steven Spielberg's visual style, and filmmakers familiar with his work will recognize some of his favorite effects. For instance, the reflection of Jim's face in the interior car window appears as a semitransparent image through which we can see the scene outside that Jim is looking at. This simple effect combines the "shot, reverse shot" editing pattern in a single shot.

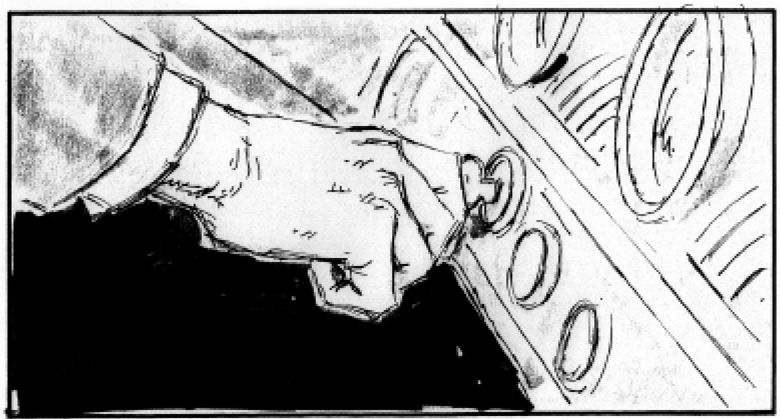
The sequence begins moments after the last one (page 78), which concluded with the beginning of the Japanese invasion of Shanghai. Our new storyboard begins when Jim's parents level the hotel and try to escape the city by car.

SC-51 J-



WIDE LOW ANGLE FROM STREET AS YANG HUSTLES JIM AND HIS PARENTS INTO THE PACKARD... (CUT TO)

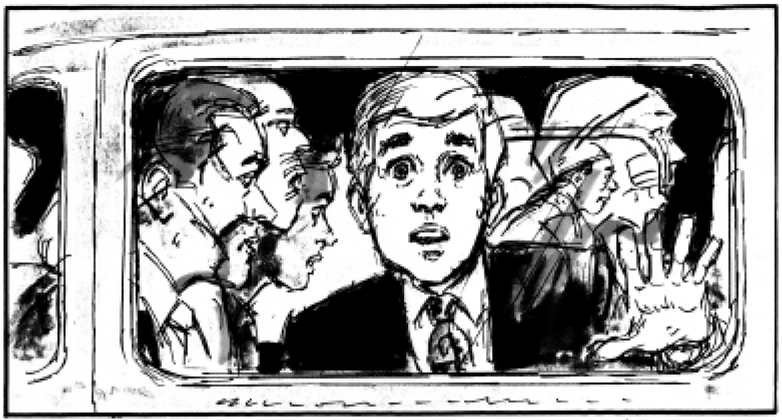
SC 52-



INT PACKARD~ ANGLE ON IGNITION SWITCH— YANG TURNS KEY & STARTS ENGINE — (CUT TO)

SC 52-A-

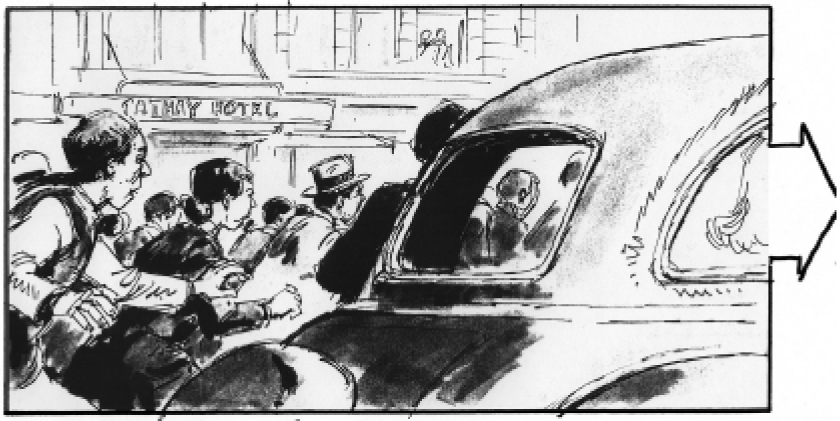
④



EXT PACKARD... ANGLE THRU WINDOW AS JIM LOOKS OUT AT THE CROWD STREAMING BY--- THEIR REFLECTIONS ON THE GLASS...

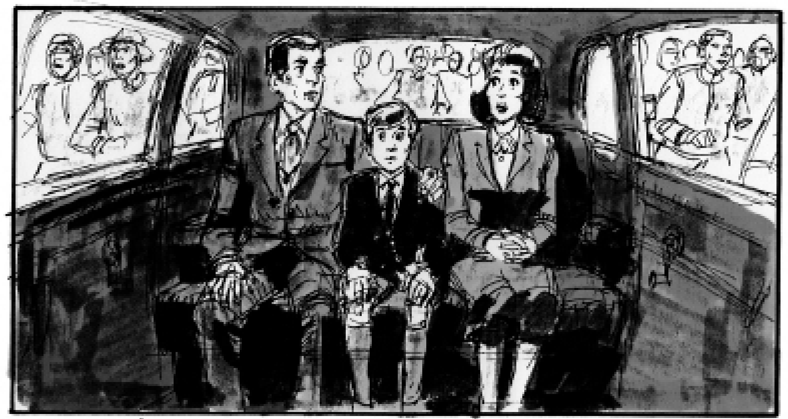
David Jonas's storyboard for *Empire of the Sun*

SC 52 A (CONT)



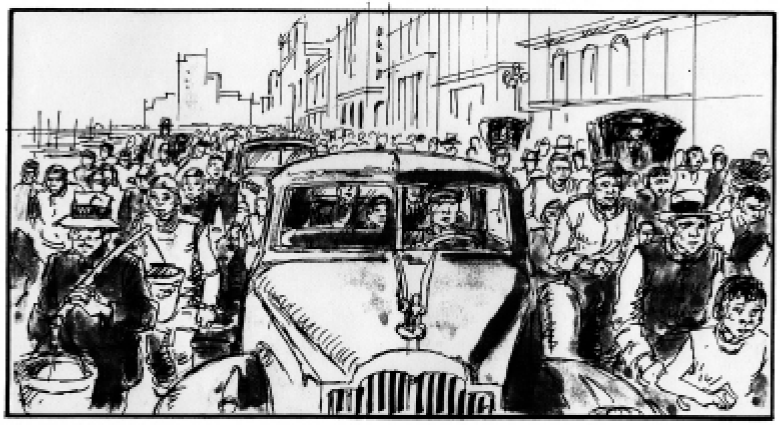
CAR EXITS FRAME .... (CUT TO)

SC·52 B



INT CAR.. JIM'S MOTHER.. "WHAT ARE WE GOING TO DO?"
JIM'S FATHER "PERHAPS THERE'LL BE A BOAT.. I'M SORRY YOU TWO...
MAX WAS RIGHT." (CUT TO)

SC 52 C

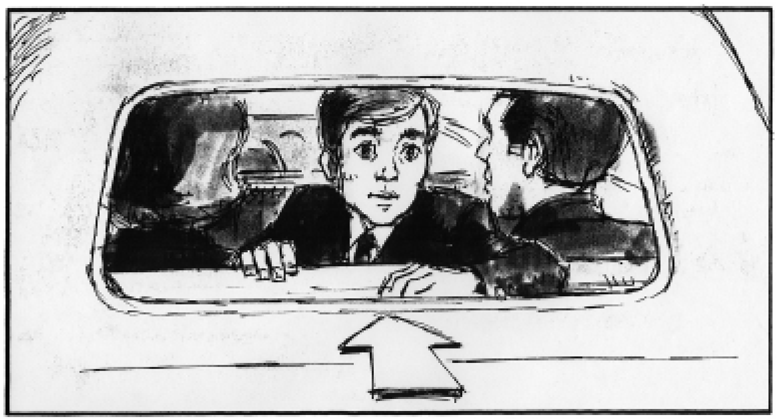


EXT.. ANGLE ON PACKARD AS IT CRAWLS ALONG WITH THE CROWD..
(CUT TO)

David Jonas's storyboard for *Empire of the Sun*

SC 52 D

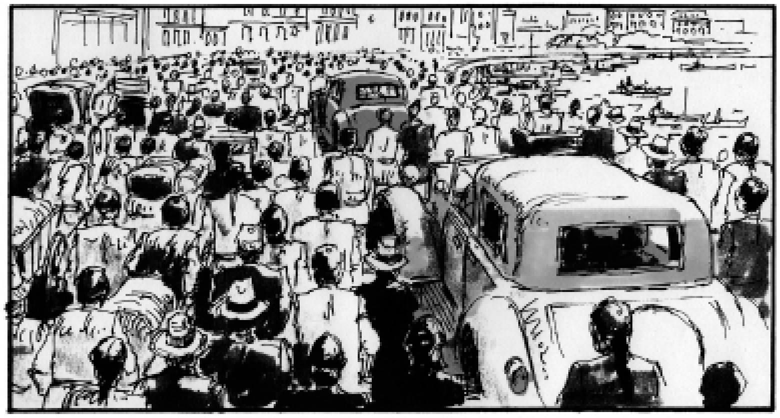
Ⓐ



EXT... ANGLE ON REAR WINDOW– JIM PEERS OUT–

SC 52 D (CONT)

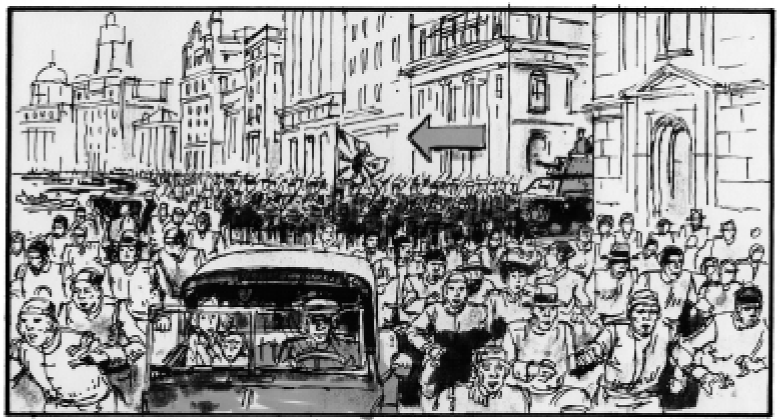
Ⓑ



HIS CAR PULLS AWAY FROM CAM FOLLOWED BY A SECOND CAR... (CUT TO)

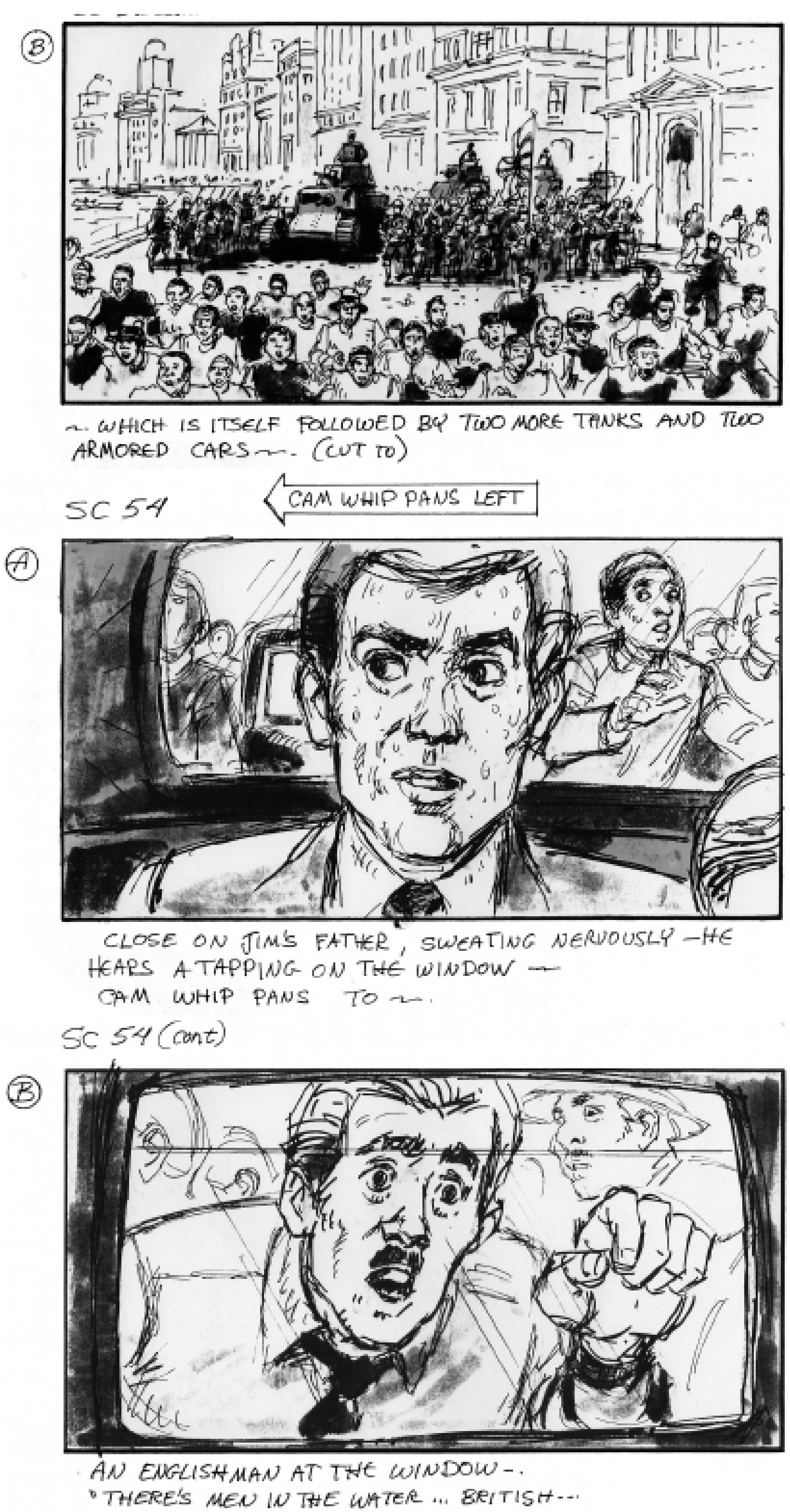
SC 53

Ⓐ



AS THE CAR FOLLOWING JIM'S PACKARD PASSES UNDER CAM, SORROUNDED BY THE CROWD, A CONTINGENT OF JAPANESE MARINES ROUNDS THE CORNER BEHIND, FOLLOWED BY A TANK –..

David Jonas's storyboard for *Empire of the Sun*



~ WHICH IS ITSELF FOLLOWED BY TWO MORE TANKS AND TWO ARMORED CARS ~ (CUT TO)

SC 54

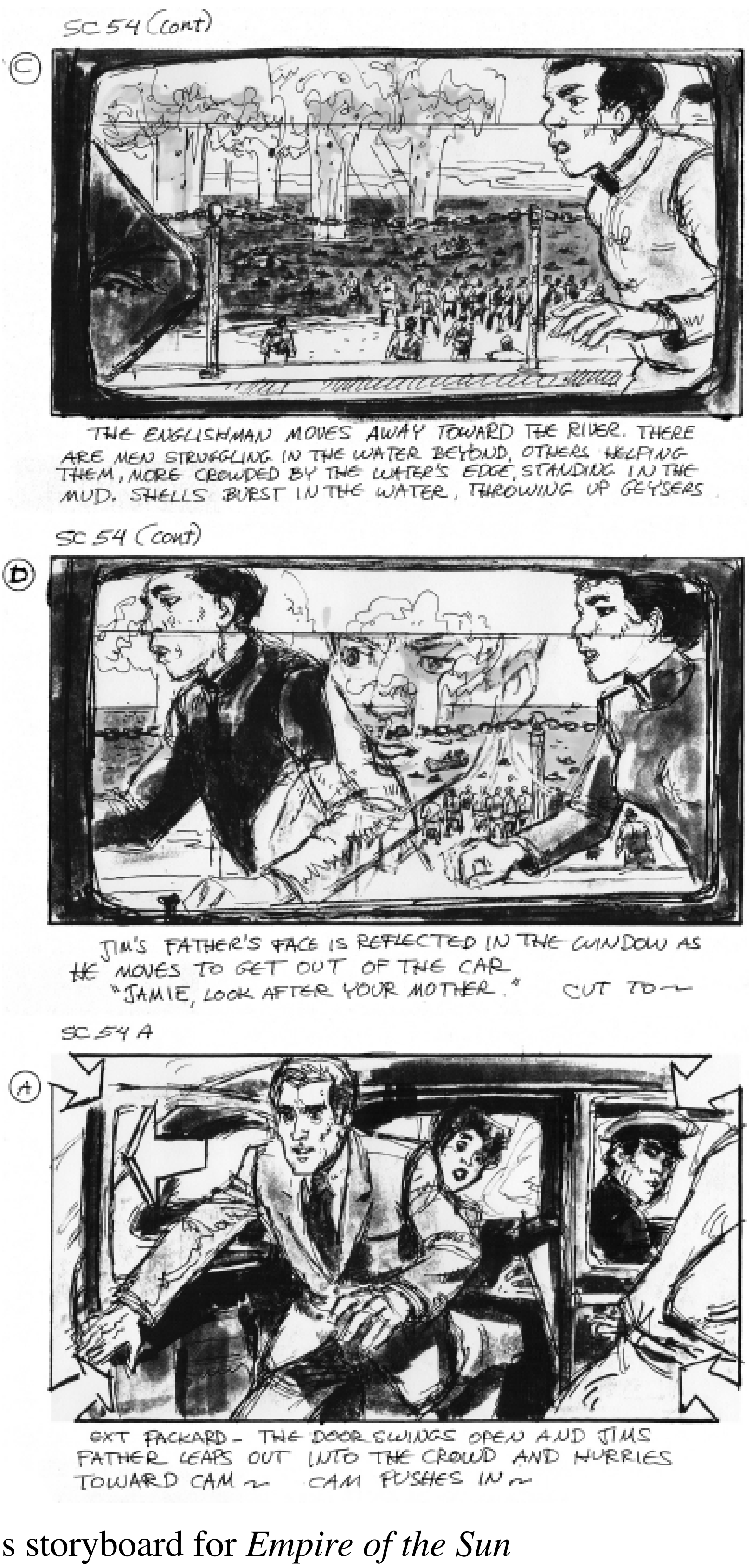
CAM WHIP PANS LEFT

CLOSE ON JIM'S FATHER, SWEATING NERVOUSLY — HE HEARS A TAPPING ON THE WINDOW —
CAM WHIP PANS TO ~.

SC 54 (cont)

AN ENGLISHMAN AT THE WINDOW –.
"THERE'S MEN IN THE WATER ... BRITISH –-

David Jonas's storyboard for *Empire of the Sun*



SC 54 (cont)

Ⓒ

THE ENGLISHMAN MOVES AWAY TOWARD THE RIVER. THERE
ARE MEN STRUGGLING IN THE WATER BEYOND, OTHERS HELPING
THEM, MORE CROWDED BY THE WATER'S EDGE, STANDING IN THE
MUD. SHELLS BURST IN THE WATER, THROWING UP GEYSERS

SC 54 (cont)

Ⓓ

JIM'S FATHER'S FACE IS REFLECTED IN THE WINDOW AS
HE MOVES TO GET OUT OF THE CAR
"JAMIE, LOOK AFTER YOUR MOTHER." CUT TO ~

SC 54 A

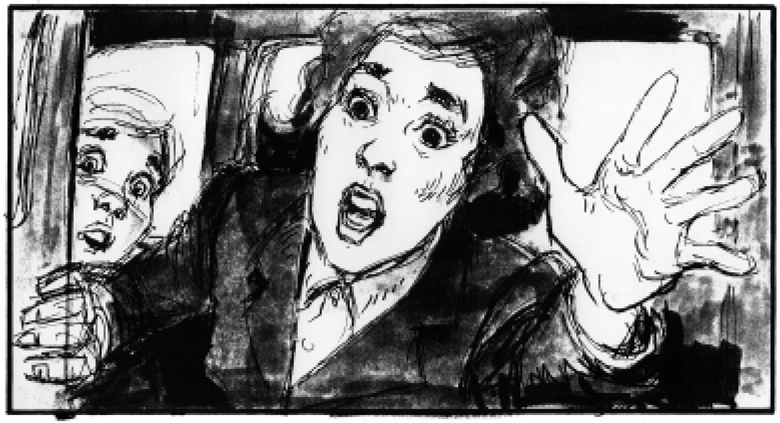
Ⓐ

EXT PACKARD - THE DOOR SWINGS OPEN AND JIMS
FATHER LEAPS OUT INTO THE CROWD AND HURRIES
TOWARD CAM ~ CAM PUSHES IN ~

David Jonas's storyboard for *Empire of the Sun*

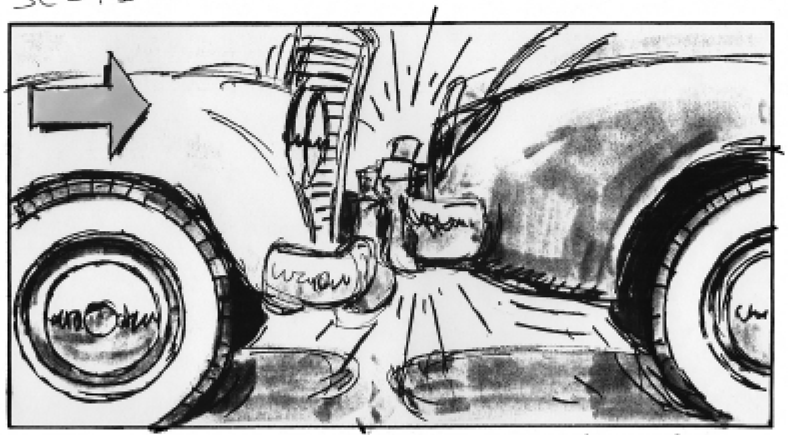
SC 54 A

Ⓑ



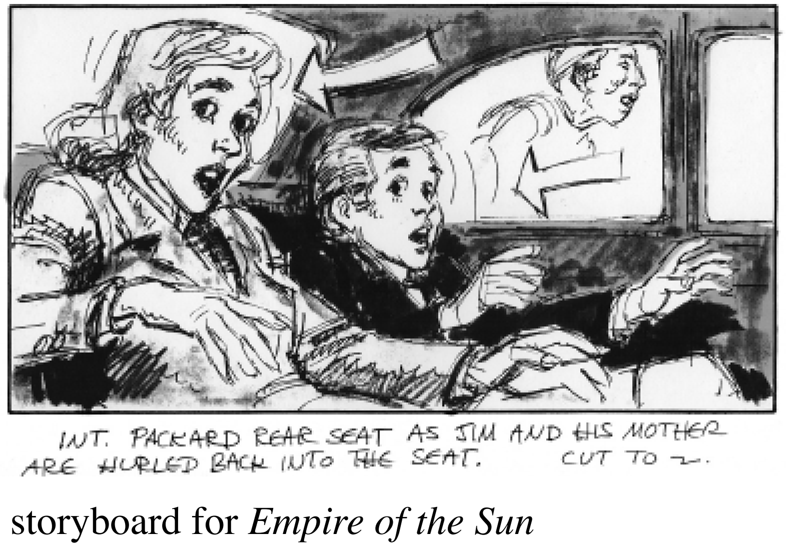
~ TO JIM'S MOTHER AS SHE LUNGES PAST JIM, CALLING OUT TO HIS FATHER - "STAY WITH US!" CUT TO ~

SC 54 B



THE CAR BEHIND SMASHING INTO THE REAR BUMPER OF THE PACKARD ~ CUT TO ~

SC 54 C



INT. PACKARD REAR SEAT AS JIM AND HIS MOTHER ARE HURLED BACK INTO THE SEAT. CUT TO ~.

David Jonas's storyboard for *Empire of the Sun*

5 The Production Cycle

In this chapter, we'll look at the production process, and how a 21st century filmmaker can develop and present his or her vision to the creative team through some well-defined stages. The terms *previs* (*previz*), *story reel*, and *animatic* are used interchangeably here, inspired by the preproduction process of an animated movie that remains the most thorough process for designing a movie.

Below are the steps in the production process for a live-action picture. This is what you'll be doing for 8–18 months on a Hollywood movie. Scriptwriting is usually completed when a movie goes into production, but I've included it here for writer/directors. For them, the creative arc from the first idea to the released movie is always based on the story. All the production steps support the filmmaker's singular focus.

- Scriptwriting
- Research
- Visual Script Analysis
- Production Design
- Rehearsal
- Cinematography

Anywhere from 10 to hundreds of artists and technicians work on a feature film, where 60-hour weeks are not uncommon. And then you're done. The sprint from inception to the screen is fast and intense. The director is faced with thousands of decisions and what may seem like endless discussions and conferences. The private time it takes to create becomes hard to find. Moviemaking is not a private process. Visualization can be the compass you rely on if you lose focus in the overload of detail that a director is expected to manage.

A detailed storyboard is useful in many ways, but in the past, its main purpose was to convey to the crew what the director is looking for in the final film. This is still an important use of previsualization, but with digital tools, we can go way beyond storyboards and create something that is a dress rehearsal for the movie.

Because many directors today are comfortable using graphic arts software, they can create a visual presentation on their own before the movie is greenlit. This predesign may even begin as a visual presentation to find investors for the movie years before production begins. The visual sales presentation is called a deck, or the director's vision book, or a pitch book. But even with the director's upfront work before production, once a movie is up and running, it may make sense to hire a previs service company or put together your own team in-house.

A slight detour into animation design is in order if only for a few paragraphs, as this represents the gold standard for visualization of a motion picture. As mentioned earlier, Disney organized and developed the modern storyboard process, although he by no means invented storyboards or the use of concept art. However, the Disney methodology is now used in all animation studios as well as many visual-effects studios and on most mainstream blockbusters.

Here's what you need to know: the purpose of animation story reels is to show a presentation that looks and sounds like your movie to an audience before the movie is released. These presentations are carefully managed to include audiences in the target demographic. Frequently, questionnaires are used to record the reaction of each test audience participant. Some directors such as animation director John A. Davis, creator, director, writer of Nickelodeon's *Jimmy Neutron: Boy Genius*, believe that sitting in a test theater with an audience allows a director to quickly learn where the movie fails to work just by observing the audience. When they are restless, they are bored. After questionnaires are collected from the audience and evaluated, it's back to work to revise the areas where the audience did not respond as expected.

Some filmmakers don't like test screenings because they believe it exposes the movie to corporate interference. This may be true, but a well-produced previs version of the movie from beginning to end with dialogue, sound effects, and music is hugely instructive as to what works and what doesn't even if you only screen the previs for the director and editor.

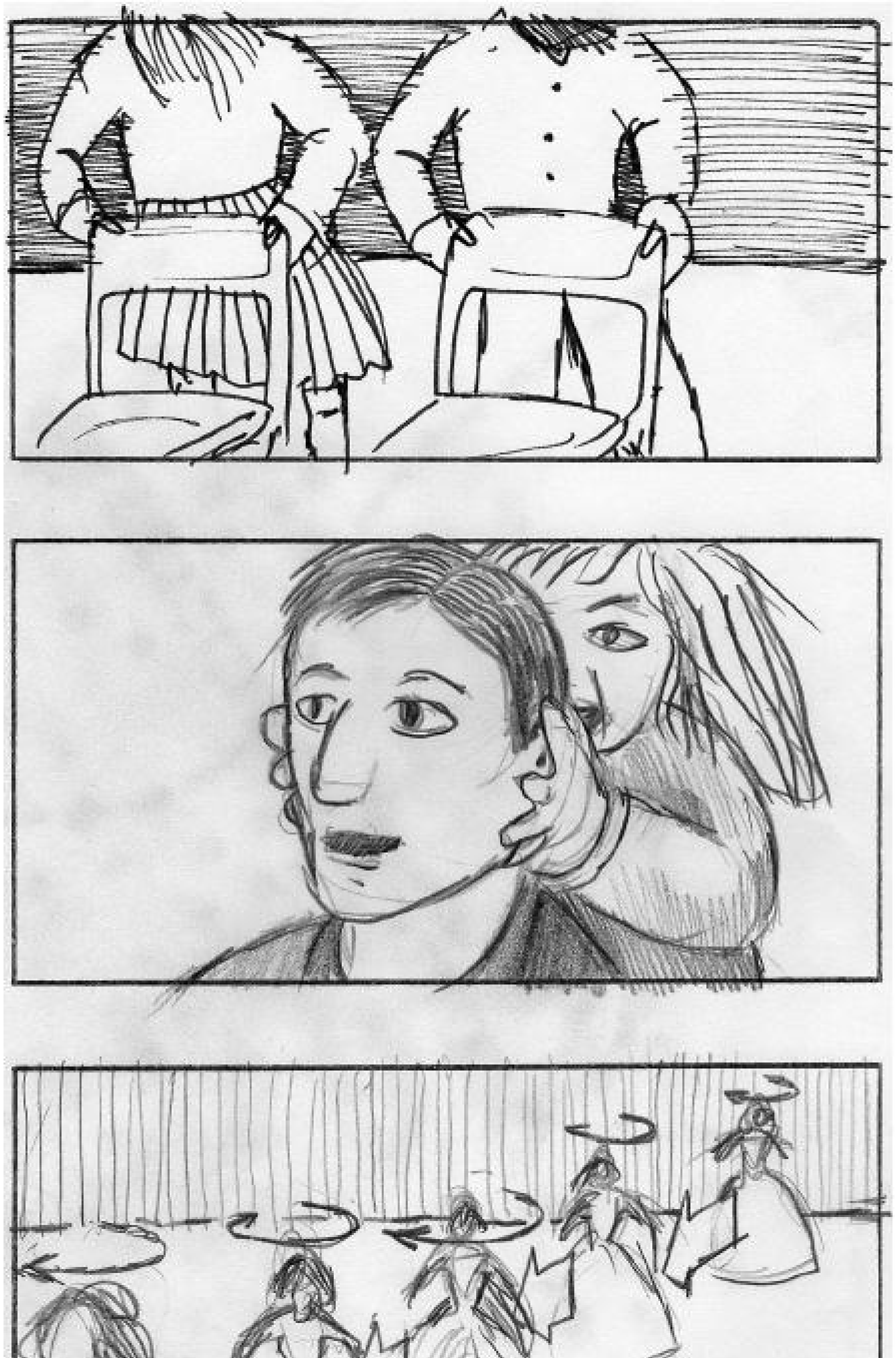
Scriptwriting

The screenplay has remained a remarkably consistent form, and the format is a now-universal set of rules practiced around the world following a very specific page layout. Agents, readers, and studios all expect the standard form, but once a movie is funded, there’s no reason not to experiment with a screenplay format that’s aimed at the crew of your movie.

What follows is an alternative approach to writing a story.

The following quote from David Byrne’s introduction to his published screenplay and storyboards for the film *True Stories* is a good description of the way in which the visualization and writing processes can be combined.

The way this film framework was constructed was inspired a little bit by my work with Robert Wilson, by his working process. He often begins work on a theater piece with mainly visual ideas and then layers the sound and dialogue on top of that. I used a similar method. I covered a wall with drawings, most of them representing events that could take place in one town. Then I reordered the drawings, again and again, until they seemed to have some sort of flow. Meanwhile I assigned the characters inspired by the tabloid newspaper articles to the people represented in the drawings.



David Byrne made drawings like this to develop his script for the movie *True Stories*.

This approach is very personal and is dependent on the fact that Byrne was the principal writer and the director of *True Stories*. His script was not written in a style intended to convince a studio to buy the project, so he was free to compose his story in a way that was more cinematic, putting visual and verbal material on an equal basis. The film is not a conventional narrative (by Hollywood standards), and this is as much a result of the compositional method as the cause of it. Observation is the key word. Throughout the making of *True Stories*, Byrne sought material that was strongly reportorial and placed it in his stylized framework. The point is that the traditional approach to screenwriting, in which words precede the image, is not the only way to write a script. On page 107 are some of the storyboard panels drawn by David Byrne that helped shape the screenplay.

Research

If you're a screenwriter you've probably done a fair amount of research, but that was probably more for the story than the visuals. Depending on the travel requirements, if any, scouting locations is research. Capture as much photography and video as you can. Try and line up possible shots. If you have an assistant, you can have them walk through the basic action of the scene while you shoot. It's a huge help when you are deciding between more than one possible location for a scene. It will also be a big help to anyone storyboarding the scene. It may even make its way into an edited animatic. This raises the question of whether or not a senior storyboard artist should go to a location. Typically, the producer, production designer, and director are the key people who visit locations. If the cinematographer is available he would also visit any key sites, but bringing a storyboard artist on scouting trips is a relatively new development and by no means the norm. It's also not a bad idea.

There are two types of research. 1) Specific research about a place or location you expect to feature in your movie and 2) information, images, and sounds that are inspirational. Specific research would be finding images of actual locations mentioned in your script; for example, the Grand Canyon or Eiffel Tower. You will find all the photos and illustrations of these locations and save them to a folder on your computer. Inspirational research might be a diner menu from the 1950s, when your movie takes place. It won’t appear in the movie, but it evokes a feeling you want to convey to the audience. You might find photos of a time or place, for instance newspaper advertisements from the period. You immerse yourself in the subject and setting of your story to help you generate the most evocative sights and sounds for your movie, but while it’s useful for you to show this to the production designer, it also works if it’s just for you.

You could end up with a few gigabytes of video, photos, music, and sound, but to prioritize them you might put them together as a collage in a pdf booklet or an edited video presentation. *How* you present images will change the way you respond to them. You can lay artwork out on the floor or tack it to a wall. You will invariably move the images around, making new juxtapositions that often generate new associations and ideas. Keep going back to it. New ideas will emerge. Later, the production designer and his or her team will be doing some of the same work, but the director will search and select images in a way unique to him and hopefully fueled by knowledge discovered while he did his own researching. Ultimately, inspirational research encourages new ideas while specific research is done to find solutions to things found in the script.

Backstory

A subcategory of research is backstory. Research is real-world facts; backstory is made-up facts. Backstory can also be part of the director’s visual exploration.

Writers often develop backstories, or biographies, for their characters that describe their lives before the time frame presented in the story. By creating fully rounded characters with pasts, writers can create the present more easily, predicting in a sense the behavior of characters whose history they know. Photographs, pictures from magazines, newspaper headlines, postcards, or a page photocopied from a high school yearbook can form a visual backstory. These real-life details will help you imagine the grit and texture of your story during the long hours spent typing on keyboard.

Here are some of the ways you can prepare the visual plan for your movie.

Visual Sketchbook

This begins with the research folder on your desktop containing images, sounds, and notes. Now you're going to add them into the screenplay on blank pages, or you can create a book just for research. Either way the goal here is to start making connections between ideas in the script and visual material that is related to themes, locations, historical periods, character arcs — everything in your script that is an adjective or noun that will eventually be an image in a movie.

There are two reasons for all this. First is to identify what you've written in the script with the actual thing in the real world. So if your story features a restored 1967 Mustang, you'll have one to show the production designer. The second reason for doing this is for the less defined aspects of the script. Like the theme, or the mood of a time and place. So you might find matchbooks from the 1950s, or an advertisement in a vintage newspaper. Maybe all the images add up to a portrait of the pre-Civil Rights Era in the South. This part of the process is less about showing specific things than about generating a mood, and most importantly, searching for the small details that help make an imagined or remembered time and place seem real. The plot mechanics of *Citizen Kane*, for example, revolved, however contrived, around the Rosebud sled. The sled was in the script, but that sort of visual metaphor is often discovered when putting together the visual sketchbook.

You will also have researchers on even a low-budget movie, so the director is not doing all the work while remaining the final decision-maker on the visual plan for the movie. To sum this up, the visual sketchbook is a way to find ideas as well as to clarify the visual choices you have already made.

VISUAL SCRIPT ANALYSIS

This comes in two flavors: dramatic and visual. Dramatic analysis is primarily for the actors and understanding the characters. I strongly recommend Judith Weston's books for directors and actors, *Directing Actors* and *The Film Director's Intuition*. These are the most thorough books on script breakdown and analysis for actors and directors, but it's not about the visual design. Visual script analysis looks outside the script for answers while dramatic analysis focuses on the text. But it's their interplay that's interesting. Here's a snapshot of how analysis generates visual ideas.

Your script has an opening scene at night. There is a lighthouse at the end of a pier. To analyze this we need to ask questions, which is essentially the Socratic Method.

Scene description

A woman, DREY, drives up to a lighthouse at night. A MAN is waiting for her at the lighthouse. She has never seen the man before. They are meeting to exchange information about the woman's husband who has been lying to her about his business trips. The man will show her pictures of her husband in locations different than he claimed to be. Drey is just now figuring out she's been lied to.

Analysis questions:

- **What is the purpose of the scene?**
- **What does the main character in the scene want?**
- **What does Drey see when she gets out of the car?**
- **What does Drey expect to learn?**
- **What does she actually learn?**
- **What do you want the audience to learn? And when?**
- **What do you want them to feel?**

Here's what the answers look like:

What is the purpose of the scene?
To show that Drey is willing to investigate her husband. She no longer trusts him.

What does the main character in the scene want?
She wants to find out that her husband has not been lying.

What does Drey see when she gets out of the car?
She sees a man who she has never met. She sees an isolated meeting place.

What does Drey expect to learn?
That if her husband has lied, he has a good reason, and it's not about her.

What does she actually learn?
She will learn her marriage is a sham. A front for something else.

What do you want the audience to learn?
That Drey is capable of defying her husband and therefore capable of putting herself in danger.

What do you want them to feel?
Sympathy for Drey, but also fear for what she might do.

Now we need to look at how the visual language of the scene supports the goals of the scene.

Here's how adding visual information might look when we add it to our list of questions:

What is the purpose of the scene?
To show that Drey is willing to investigate her husband. She no longer trusts him.

Visual: *She is walking into the wind, leaning forward. This shows the effort she will make to get information. She's determined.*

What does the main character in the scene want?
She wants to find out that her husband has not been lying.

Visual: *She has her iPhone and is going to secretly tape the conversation. This shows she believes the informant is not trustworthy, but her husband is.*

What does Drey see when she gets out of the car?
She sees a man who she has never met. She sees an isolated meeting place.

Visual: *It's a long walk from the parking lot to the informant. The informant is small in the distance alongside the huge lighthouse.*

What does Drey expect to learn?
That if her husband has lied, he has a good reason to withhold information.

Visual: *Drey can be fumbling with the phone she expects to use to record the converstation. She might inadvertantly swipe to pictures of her family for a moment.*

What does she actually learn?
She will learn that her marriage is a sham. A front for something else.

Visual: *She is shown pictures that definitively establishes that her husband leads a double life.*

What do you want the audience to learn?
That Drey is capable of defying her husband and therefore capable of putting herself in danger.

Visual: *Drey asks for the pictures. This indicates she plans to use them somehow and this can only produce conflict and danger.*

What do you want them to feel?
Sympathy for Drey, but also fear for what she might do.

Visual: *Create some mistake that Drey makes in her interaction with the informant. This will make her vulnerable.*

As you can see, not all the visuals have been worked out, but the process is underway.

Here are some ideas that surface: Perhaps the informant remains concealed. He wears a hoodie and sunglasses, and it's night. This places Drey in a much riskier situation. It's a multiplier of the tension in the scene.

The lighthouse was originally written in the script as abandoned, but perhaps it's still functional. This allows us to have the spotlight on top of the lighthouse rotate (that's what they do). This provides a light that pans over Drey and where she's walking. Similarly, when she meets the informant, he's in almost complete darkness, but every 10–15 seconds, the light pans over the scene again, but only for a few seconds. This allows you to cut without cutting. The light, as it passes over the informant, reveals and then goes away. So the light defines a momentary "shot." The director has an opportunity for Drey to be hyper-attentive when the light reveals small details about the informant.

This is as far as we need to go here, but the same analysis process could be applied to the color choices for the scene, camera placement, POV, music, and sound effects.

Visual Script Analysis — Three Samples

Every filmmaker will devise his own way of working with the script before shooting. Some filmmakers use storyboards while others write out a shot list or an aerial view diagram of the location indicating camera setups. There are many ways of turning the script into sequences, and your way of working may vary with the project. The suggestions that follow represent several methods of devising a shot plan or storyboard for a scene. They could best be described as a series of daydreaming sessions based on, but not restricted to, the script.

Let's apply the different methods of planning shots to a hypothetical script, *Appomattox*, based on the surrender of Robert E. Lee to Ulysses S. Grant at Appomattox Court House at the end of the Civil War on April 9, 1865.

After reading the script many times and working on a final polish with the writer, the director has a general sense of how most of the scenes should be staged. He has written notes in the margin of the script detailing specific ideas. He ultimately transfers these to a separate notebook, which includes photographs, sketches, and other reference material he has gathered. Later, he visits Appomattox Court House and other location sites and takes photographs at each location. Now the director is ready to begin working out the shot-by-shot plan for each scene.

Creating a shot plan means describing the staging of the action, the size of the shot, the choice of lens, and the camera angle. If the director uses a shot list, it might read: "Wide shot, using a long focal-length lens to compress the foreground and background. The camera is looking down on the Union line from a modest high angle with trees in the immediate foreground. The camera pans with a horseman who enters the right side of the frame."

These are all traditional descriptions of the graphic quality and photographic quality of a shot. The director, however, is ultimately interested in how the photographic qualities of a shot determine the narrative effect of the scene. The following exercise is a good way to heighten your awareness of the relationship between visual and dramatic elements by rephrasing traditional shot descriptions in dramatic terms. In the four categories listed below, graphic qualities are matched with equivalent narrative qualities, posed as questions.

1. **Graphic:** Where is the camera stationed?
   Narrative: Whose point of view is being expressed?
2. **Graphic:** What is the size of the shot?
   Narrative: What distance are we from the subject of the scene?
3. **Graphic:** What is our angle of view?
   Narrative: What is our relationship to the subject?
4. **Graphic:** Are we cutting or moving the camera?
   Narrative: Are we comparing points of view?

All these questions overlap somewhat, but answering them individually is a technique that forces you to see the material in new ways. Now we can see how they might be applied to the script excerpts from *Appomattox*.

Shot Plan — First Draft

After the director has visited the locations a second time and made preliminary production choices based on the budget, he makes a shot plan that is more than wishful thinking. He begins by taking the location photos and any other research material and spreads it out where he works. Next, an image list is made (not a shot list), based on the ideas that come to mind when reading the script. He can write these on index cards, one image to a card. This exercise amounts to free association and can include the director's feelings about the characters, how they are standing, what they are looking at, or the look of the location. Sometimes a personal experience comes to mind that is pertinent. For example, the director remembers losing a fight in elementary school and the sympathetic look on the face of a friend afterwards. He writes a description of this potential shot on an index card. Finally, the director includes specific shot or compositional ideas of thumbnail sketches if he has drawing skill.

Second Draft

Now the director becomes more specific. We will use **Script Sample 1** from *Appomattox* to show one way the director might work.

```
EXT. NORTHERN LINE AT APPOMATTOX CREEK — MIDDAY

We are behind the thin line of battle of the Northern troops.
They are remarkably quiet as the entire line of men watches
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four horsemen under a flag of truce approach across an open
field. One of the horsemen is General Robert E. Lee. The line
slowly parts to let the riders pass. The soldiers turn and
watch Lee travel down the slope behind them into the trees that
line the creek. Several of the soldiers walk a short distance
down the slope to watch the General disappear into the mottled
sunlight of the forest.
```

The action describes the first stage of Lee's surrender to Grant. The lines of battle during the Civil War were nothing less than the boundary between victory and defeat, so when the Confederacy's greatest general moves behind the Union line it is an incredible moment. The Northern soldiers know they are witnessing history and very probably the end of the Civil War.

It seems to be the screenwriter's intent in this scene to see the events from the Northern soldiers' point of view. This is a valid choice and answers the first of our four questions: Whose point of view is being expressed?

Next, we need to answer question two: What is the size of the shot — wide, medium, or close-up? Or, in narrative terms, what distance are we from the subject? This requires some clarification. I prefer to think of shot size in terms of distance, since it discourages thinking of the shot size as a picture frame surrounding the subject. Actually, the frame is a three-dimensional box with the camera at one end. While we *see* the four sides of the frame, we *feel* the distance to the subject. Because the camera is our point of view, the size of the frame tells us how close we are to the action or subject. In narrative film, physical distance translates to *emotional distance*. When we speak of shot size, we are really talking about our emotional relationship with the action on screen.

Since the director has decided to make the point of view of this first shot that of the Union soldiers, the shot size/emotional distance refers to the soldiers' emotional separation from Robert E. Lee. He is at the dramatic center of the scene. Though they may feel grudging admiration for him, and even sympathy, until this moment he was their mortal enemy. For this reason, the director's choice of shot size/distance never comes closer than a full shot of Lee as he rides past. He must remain inscrutable. The audience must strain to see emotion on his face. To achieve this restraint, distance is required.

Now the director considers the angle of view. Having determined the point of view and distance, he knows that the camera will be placed alongside the soldiers awaiting Lee's approach. If the camera is at a low angle, it may cause some practical problems because soldiers may block the camera's view. At the same time, the director considers the experience of the men on the line to be communal since they are all intently focused on Lee and share many of the same thoughts. Therefore, the camera should treat the soldiers as a group. For both these reasons, the director believes the camera should be at a medium high angle, perhaps 7–8 feet above the ground. In this way, the camera has a clear view of Lee while encompassing many of the soldiers in the shot.

Finally, the director comes to the question of editing (cutting vs. camera movement) and whether or not the point of view should change. The director's sense of the action is that it should develop slowly as Lee appears in the distance and moves towards the Northern line. There may be shots of individual soldiers as the word spreads that Lee is approaching, but the scene is solemn and should not be rushed. Therefore, a sequence shot on a crane with the camera dipping down among the men for a close look before moving up again as General Lee passes would be a good choice. With this last decision, the director has determined how the scene will be shot.

This is how these decisions might be written in the shot list for script sample 1:

"The camera is placed among the Northern troops on a crane or long jib arm. Camera viewpoint is along the soldiers' line of sight to Lee approaching at a distance. The camera starts low among the men as their attention turns to Lee approaching. The camera follows the group of men to the line of battle. The camera slowly goes up to 8–10 feet as Lee passes by. Pan with Lee and other horsemen as they pass. Additional shots: Shots of men at various activities behind the line as they learn that Lee is coming." Figure 5.1 would accompany the notes.

As you can see, the schematic drawing can only roughly approximate a dolly shot combined with a crane move upwards when we are dealing with a sequence shot. The choreography of camera and the subject (timing of the pan and the position of the camera when Lee passes, etc.) cannot be shown without notes. The schematic, however, enables the production designer, cinematographer, production manager, and assistant director to get cast, crew, and equipment to the right place. This plan outlines all the problems that the creative and organizational team needs to understand. This is our first plan for the script; now we can try another.

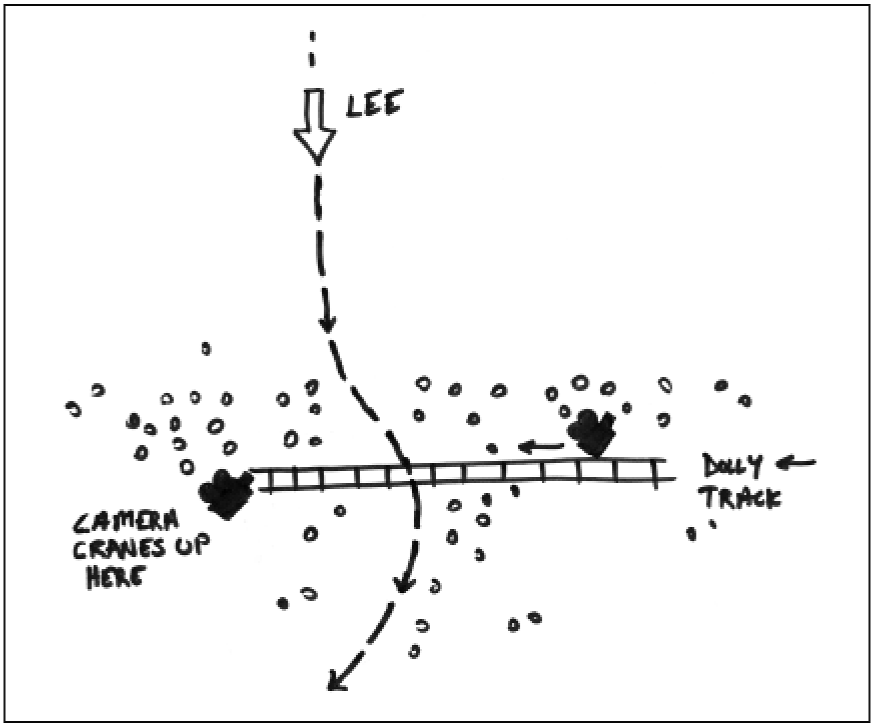

Figure 5.1

Moving on to **Script Sample 2**, the director shifts to another scene in a new location.

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EXT. FIELD — NORTHERN SIDE
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We are on the side of the Union skirmishers who were on the
verge of clashing with Rebel pickets when a one-hour truce was
called. The advance line of greybacks are seated in a field at
the edge of a line of trees facing the blue skirmishers, who
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are seated in and on both sides of a dusty road not quite 100 yards away. The men on both sides can see each other clearly. One Union soldier sits near camera whiling away the time poking his bayonet into an anthill.

This time the director doesn't analyze the scene but instead writes out camera instructions based on the action written in the script. He plans to cut several shots together rather than use a long sequence shot:

"Low angle of rebels in a field facing an equal number of bluecoats. Camera is on the Union side shooting past several of the Union soldiers. In the extreme foreground, a very young bluecoat passes the time by watching an ant crawl up the bayonet of his rifle, which he has plunged into an anthill. More and more ants come out. Across the field, one of the rebels nearest the young bluecoat is watching him from a distance of about 60 yards. The young bluecoat looks up and the two soldiers make eye contact. Self-conscious, the bluecoat pulls his bayonet out of the ground, destroying the anthill. He then shakes the ants off the bayonet. Cut to new shot from behind the rebel. The rebel sees the bluecoat raise his gun, and thinking that it is some kind of boastful gesture, picks up his own gun and lays it across his lap. He looks straight back at the bluecoat, staring him down with a smile."

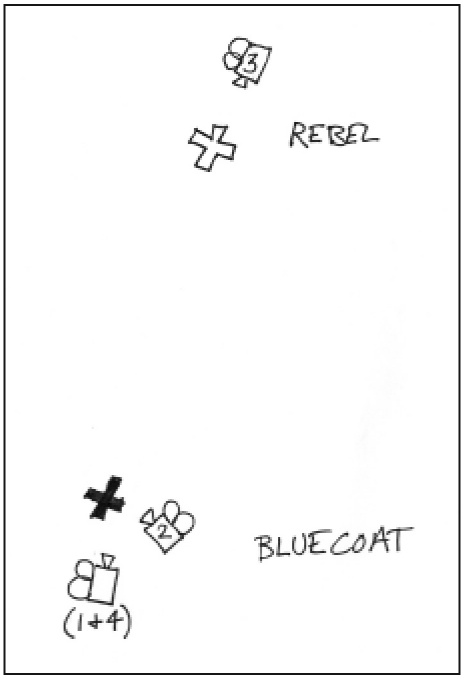


Figure 5.2: The schematic drawing at left uses numbers for each camera angle in the sequence. The numbers correspond to the storyboard panels that would follow this initial plan. The storyboard panels appear on pages 120 and 121.

Shot list:

1. Profile of bluecoat alongside anthill. Rebel soldier in bg.
2. CU anthill and bayonet.
3. Reverse wide over the shoulder (OTS) of rebel soldier and bluecoat in bg.

4 Over the shoulder (OTS) of bluecoat and rebel in bg.

Figure 5.2 shows how the schematic might appear for this scene.

Now we can move to **Script Sample 3** and see how a dialogue scene might be handled. This time we are in a farmhouse with General Lee.

INT. PARLOR — BRICK FARMHOUSE — AFTERNOON

General Robert E. Lee sits in a chair in a corner of the room. He stares out the window.

Then realizing that he is staring, he begins to look around the room, but this is nothing more than a form of pacing. Even this is studied, and no action or emotion is shown that will betray his feelings. His military secretary, Lt. Col. Charles Marshall, a much younger man, looks at a picture on the wall, taking his cue from his general to remain impassive. From time to time Marshall looks to see what Lee is doing and finally takes a seat by the fireplace.

Standing in the front hallway is Lt. Col. Or-ville Babcock of Grant's staff. He has left Lee and Marshall alone in the parlor rather than make small talk, which is uncomfortable for all of them. Babcock is greatly relieved to see General Grant and General Sheridan enter the gate in the front yard. Babcock opens the door and lets the officers in. Everyone stands.

BABCOCK

(to Grant)

General Grant—

Grant barely acknowledges Babcock. His thoughts are on only one man. He goes directly across the parlor to Lee, who stands to greet him. The two men shake hands.

GRANT

General Lee.

Grant looks around for a chair and Lee sits in his former place. Grant is distracted for a moment as Babcock lets five other officers into the room. They slowly file in and take places around the room, and Marshall steps back to the fireplace. Grant pulls a chair up and sits down directly across from Lee. Grant tries to make the moment less tense for both of them.

GRANT

I met you once before General Lee. I was stationed in New Mexico, and you came to inspect the brigade. I have always remembered your appearance and I think I should have recognized you anywhere.

LEE

Yes, I know I met you on that occasion and I have tried to recollect how you looked. But I have never been able to recall a single feature.

This time the shot plan is not worked out in full. Since an interior scene with dialogue and restricted movement is more easily staged with the actors, descriptions consist of observations about the characters and how they might be revealed with the camera. The shot notes might appear as follows.

Shot plan:

1. Wide shot looking into room at Lee seated in the parlor of the farmhouse. In the foreground is Lt. Col. Babcock, a member of Grant's staff, who escorted Lee through the lines. Standing in the

room near Lee is Lt. Col. Marshall, Lee's military secretary. Babcock is looking out the window, but he has also chosen to remain in the hall and leave Lee alone with Marshall. Babcock looks in at Lee, who is adjusting his glove. We hear voices outside. Offscreen, Babcock straightens up.

2. Ext. Profile LONG SHOT of house and front yard. Slightly low angle. Grant is entering the gate with General Sheridan. He is walking fast and brushing dust off his rumpled uniform in a last-minute effort to make himself presentable, but he doesn't break stride as he does so.
3. Int. Shot of Parlor. Camera is behind Lee at back of room. Lee has stood up to greet Grant. Grant enters the front door and walks straight to Lee. The two men shake hands. CUT TO:
4. REVERSE SHOT OF LEE AND GRANT as they shake hands. Marshall crosses frame and CAMERA PULLS BACK. Grant looks for a chair, Lee sits in his former place, and Grant pulls up a chair for himself before Babcock can help him. Grant seems nervous. Lee is a study in composure. CUT TO:
5. MED. SHOT OF FRONT DOOR. Camera height 5 feet. Union officers enter quietly as if attending a funeral. All steal glances of Lee. Camera backs up with them, pans with one officer to—

   WIDE SHOT OF ROOM. ANGULAR PROFILE OF LEE AND GRANT, FAVORING LEE. Camera height 4 feet. Hold this throughout the entire conversation between the generals (this is the master).
6. OTS LEE.
7. OTS GRANT.
8. CU LEE.
9. CU GRANT.

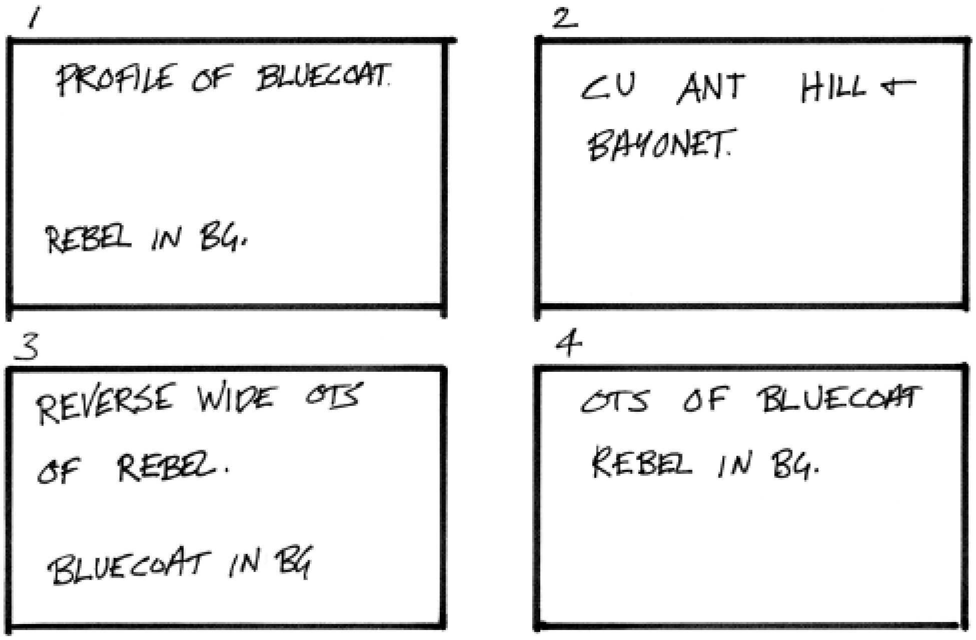


Figure 5.3: This storyboard began with the schematic in Figure 5.2 (page 117).

As you can see, there's no strict form. Notes, diagrams, shot lists — anything that clarifies what needs to be shot is useful. The only goal is to be concise and to the point while including all the important visual detail. Usually an overall description of the staging and visual action precedes the numbered shots. In this way, the cameraman, actors, and crew will understand the general plan and purpose for the staging, so that when the numbered shots appear, the cutting and composition of the scene is clear.

Preparing a Storyboard

The shot plan the director just prepared is fairly precise. Now he's ready to turn this into a storyboard. One way to begin is to write out the shot plan in storyboard boxes but without drawings. This forces the director to think in sequence. For some reason, even a shot list seems to be more cinematic — closer to what will be seen on the screen — if each shot description appears within the borders of a frame. Storyboard frames of this type for the shot plan beginning on page 119 are shown in Figure 5.3.

Next, the director adds drawings or photographs. This could be thumbnail sketches or smartphone snapshots. Figures can be drawn over any photos. The director has a supply of close-ups, medium shots, and long shots of the principal actors. He uses these for his storyboard. He pastes the storyboard panels onto individual pages and places them in a loose-leaf binder so that the order of the shots can be changed. Figure 5.4 on page 121 is the type of drawing the director might make at this stage.

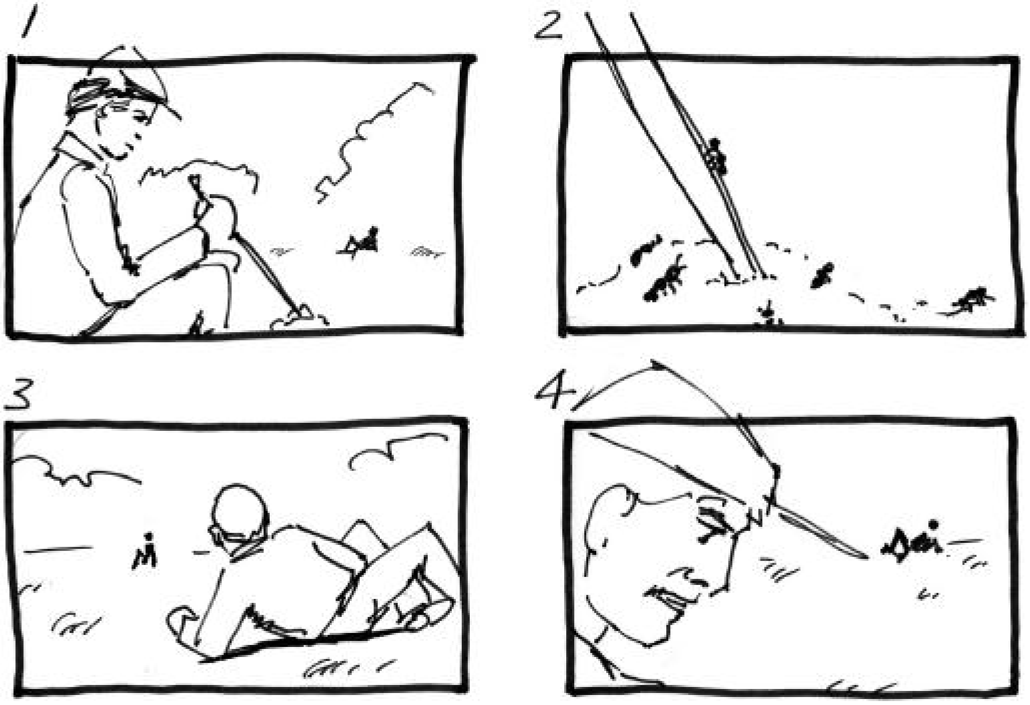


Figure 5.4: The final storyboard resulting from the script interpretation process.

The director plays music while working with the storyboard and imagining the scene. Different music suggests different ideas. When working with a dramatic scene, the director might record rehearsal dialogue and play this back while designing a scene.

It may take several films to greatly improve your visual memory by working with sequential art in this way, but your visualization skills will ultimately be sharpened. Longer and more complex sequences will eventually become easier to manage. You will find that your ability to judge what does and does not work (for you) has greatly improved.

Models and Miniatures

For a film like *Appomattox*, models are particularly valuable. The first scene in our sample script, Lee crossing the Union line of battle during a truce, involves hundreds of costumed extras, horses, and special props like wagons and cannons. The logistical problem of staging such a scene is enormous, and visualizing what goes on behind the camera is as important as what the camera will record. The assistant director and the production manager might want to include access roads, generator truck, crane, dolly track, and any other equipment that will be a factor in staging the action.

Planning the first scene of *Appomattox*, the director tries different groupings of the miniature figures, photographing each of them with a still camera. Or, he might go directly to a 3D app such as Frame Forge or Maya and have a model of the location built, including soldiers, horses, and any other props needed for the scene. With the landscape set up and lit for the correct time of day, the director can easily move the camera around within the scene and line up dozens of angles, exporting them as images for the storyboard in the space of a couple of hours.

PRODUCTION DESIGN

The art department is set up during preproduction; and, depending on the type of picture, its function is to build the sets, props, and costumes, and integrate these with real locations into a cohesive whole. All this is done quickly, so the director will be spending much of his time going to locations or back at the production offices reviewing costumes and sets. Time to research independently is over. You're on the clock now. There will be a production office with rooms for the art departments, but nowadays, painters and storyboard artists may work at home part-time.

When you begin, you will present any research you've done. It could be a lot or a little. Over the course of a few weeks, the production designer will show alternative approaches to the design, and bring in his or her own research materials. Concept artists and storyboard artists will begin work after being assigned scenes by the director. There may be several meetings a week as the director gives feedback to the artists. There will be revisions and searches for ideas. In addition to the scene-by-scene art decisions the director and production designer must make there's an ongoing search for a visual logline. This is the feeling or idea that expresses the story's core in a visual way. After a few weeks or even months of designing, looking at dozens of coffee table books and location scouting, key decisions are made.

You might bring in a previs team or create one in house. At this point, there should be a solid foundation of approved locations and designs, you are by no means finished with either of these, but you are well along. These are shared with the previs team who will most likely attend story meetings. Let's say this movie has a $12 million budget; production may be only five months. For a $110 million budget, preproduction might last a year or longer. On a very low-budget picture, under $1.5 million, the director may have to do much of his own planning, or not plan. There's no budget for the in-depth approach described above, but there would still be an art department. The solution with micro budgets is often to shoot in a documentary style.

One trend that is inevitable is virtual production design — the result of the digital mixing of gaming technology, virtual sets, and digital effects. It's a natural evolution to combine real-time photorealistic game engines like Unity and green screen keying to isolate foreground elements to preview visual effects. Digital matte painting and digital sets have been in wide use for 20 years, but more recently, the idea of creating a movie with actors entirely in a studio with actors and a few props in front of a green screen is being experimented with for use in both motion pictures and television production featuring sci-fi or fantasy worlds. Today there are many films in which a substantial portion of a movie was shot against a green screen.

Virtual sets have definite advantages over shooting in exotic locations, but they are more expensive than a $10K matte shot with a still painting standing in for a background location. Digital sets require an expensive setup process, and coming up with seamlessly integrated digital and real elements requires a large team of artists. However, this is the future. What will change is that render times for digital elements will come down, and many, many pre-made sets and locations will be for sale. This has already begun, but in 20 years, the techniques now used by Hollywood blockbusters will be commoditized. We can see this already, but prices and complexity still need to improve. Today, virtual sets are designed the same way live sets would be created, although many technical issues associated with live action go away. The question is whether or not digital is equal to a live location. Right now, the answer is that the top VFX studios in the world such as ILM or WETA or dozens of smaller boutiques around the world can create digital worlds that are indistinguishable from the real world. While that's 90% true of the best of the VFX pictures, there is an artificiality to most digital film worlds that does not match the real world. It's also a very insular approach to filmmaking. A director gains inspiration and finds evanescent details on location that no green screen studio shoot offers.

Production design has to be largely completed when principal photography begins. Most movies are shot in 4–7 weeks, longer for bigger pictures, but not much longer. The production designer and the art department remain in place through production because things change, including losing a location to bad weather. However, once cinematography begins, storyboarding is reduced to a skeleton crew. But the handoff from production design to cinematography begins at the start of principal photography.

CAMERA TESTS

The last part of production design, camera tests, were more common in the past when film was the standard photographic medium. In the 1930s, 40s, and 50s, everything intended to be seen in the movie was subjected to a camera test. This included anything fabricated, rented, or bought. Tests of this kind still make sense, even though with electronic cinematography, feedback on set is instantaneous. Actors respond to lighting styles differently and this is better worked out before a scene is being shot. Most actors have a "good" or preferred side for shooting. Certain lighting setups that work for one actor may be unflattering for another actor in the same scene. Before digital cinematography, the test process was much more complex because the test footage had to be process and printed, two steps that introduce other changes. In digital photography and finishing, there is huge control over color in a scene far beyond what was ever possible in the pre-digital era.

Still, it makes sense to do some of this testing, particularly lighting setups for the actors. While digital cinematography and color correction (also called a Digital Intermediate or DI) have become enormously powerful, it's a costly way to correct things that might have been avoided with a test. An entire book could be created about the postproduction correction of foolish mistakes made during filming. And all of this post-processing is a combination of production design, cinematography, and lighting. The person with all this control might be a color-correction artist at a postproduction facility. Technology has given all the artists on a film the ability to go far beyond their traditional areas of expertise.

REHEARSAL

Among the pleasures of reading or watching fiction are the odd details and small moments of everyday life that we often forget until we see them in a book or on the screen. Actors and directors store up these impressions through constant observation, and this is one of the things you hope to stimulate while collaborating. Often the pressure of the shooting process gets in the way of tapping these small bits of behavior, which the actor must incorporate intuitively. When this happens, actors and directors tend to fall back on the obvious in their creative choices. It is the director's job to create an environment in which the actor can connect with his adventurous impulses and find the unexpected and unpredictable in their work together. It is this, more than anything else, which contributes to creative staging (and all other aspects of performance). Once the actor locates within himself the quirkiness of the everyday, and makes it his own through action, the director has only to compose it within the frame.

Unfortunately, rehearsal time prior to principal photography on most features is very short (sometimes nonexistent) as compared with live theater. If a full cast is assembled for two or three weeks before the film begins, this is considered extremely generous. By comparison, stage directors are accustomed to having three or four times as much rehearsal time.

Previewing Rehearsal Scenes

In the digital era, an actor and director can review a performance instantly on set as soon as it's recorded. The same is true for a rehearsal.

The difficulty of honing a script and performances within the hectic schedule of a motion-picture production was one of the reasons that MGM's head of production, Irving Thalberg, followed Groucho Marx's suggestion that the Marx Brothers test the routines for *A Night at the Opera* on stage before a live audience before filming began. The Marx Brothers didn't have iPhones, but you do. In fact, with all the cameras now available it's reasonable to consider a multi-camera shoot as long as the process and setup don't distract or delay the actors. Using multiple cameras simultaneously the actors can work as an ensemble unlike the practice of motion pictures where performances are shot separately in various close-ups and medium shots in a highly fragmented way.

In addition to previewing dramatic elements, the specifics of camera angles and staging can also be refined in rehearsal. If a rehearsal space is used, the floor can be marked off with masking tape indicating doorways and furniture so that the actors have the general sense of the layout of an actual location. If props are available, or the appropriate furniture can be found, this is better still. An actor is motivated by the detail of a place. Any prop that can be easily included to give the rehearsal space reality is a plus. If a scene takes place in a diner, go to a diner during off hours with the actors. Usually no one will object to your having an assistant shoot with a small camera or a smart phone.

If you are using a sketch artist to do boards it might be useful for him or her to attend the rehearsals from time to time or to view the rehearsal tapes. If a rehearsal room is used to simulate a location not yet available — for example, a busy shopping mall interior — the artist will add the background in his drawings or any other customization necessary.

This brings us to the final stages of the production cycle, and at this point, you are into principal photography. Visualization continues, though by now the director has previewed so many versions of the script that he can fluidly improvise if he so chooses. Much of the time things will be shot according to a definite plan, and the director and crew will have the storyboard on set for reference. Ed Verreaux, a production illustrator turned art director who storyboarded several of Steven Spielberg's movies, told me highly rendered boards for each shooting day were displayed on the set for the crew to see. As each shot was accomplished, it was checked off.

CINEMATOGRAPHY

It's not uncommon for a busy cinematographer to join the production team of a film only a couple of weeks before principal photography begins. This means the director of photography (DP) must move quickly to learn the production demands of the film, which has probably been in preproduction for many months. Upon joining the team, the cinematographer immediately visits the locations with the director, and reviews the storyboards, sets, props, costumes, and makeup, possibly shooting tests of any of these elements.

Though it varies with each film, the cinematographer’s major responsibilities are lighting, setting the exposure, and executing the framing and camera movement determined by the director, production designer, editor, and the cinematographer himself. It seems strange to many people that the cinematographer does not have absolute control of the shot flow, but it is ultimately the director’s call.

Most of the time, the DP and director will screen films or review art books related to the subject of the movie. Typically, the team screens movies with similar subject matter. Oftentimes, what is discovered are the things you *don’t want to do*. The cinematographer will review the various research materials, set designs, and previs, but at this point, many art direction decisions are locked in.

In the final weeks before shooting, the director should have a precise understanding of the environment of his story, including sets, locations, major props, costumes, and makeup. Generally, though, cinematographers do not like storyboards since they encroach on their responsibilities. This is as much imagined as real since the storyboard designers have much more time to design the series of shots that make up a scene than the cinematographer. Additionally, they are able to put their shots in an edited sequence with sound, music, and dialogue and refine it over days, weeks, or months. Without storyboards, the DP usually works out the staging and composition on the day of the shoot. There may be some discussion and planning with the DP days before the shooting of a scene since this will help determine what sorts of camera dolly system is needed on set, but this is a loose visual plan that will be refined on set. Without a storyboard, directors and producers tend to be more concerned about coverage and may take fewer creative risks. At the end of the day, no one can guarantee how a reasonably complex scene will work without previs or a detailed storyboard. Even then, a choice by an actor on set could send the director off in a new direction. Here the cinematographer will be invaluable. They are improvisers, responding to the invention actors bring to a scene. For all our talk of of visual stylistic concerns, actors are the unpredictable center of the story. After the actors, the director's closest relationship on set is the cinematographer.

Part II

Elements of the Continuity Style

6 Composing Shots: Spatial Connections

Shot Size

As we all know, the universal units of composition are the long shot, the medium shot, and the close-up. Though they can be used to describe spaces as large as the solar system or as small as the head of a pin, we always know approximately how large an area is being framed when these terms are used. That's because the shots are scaled to the subject and related to one another proportionately.

A long shot of the Empire State Building frames all of the building and a generous piece of Manhattan; a medium shot of the building would lop off some of the lower floors. Moving in for a close-up, a single window might fill the frame. There are no absolute rules in the use of these terms and even the terms themselves vary. In Figure 6.1 on page 130, the basic framing heights are shown for the human figure.

The change of size from shot to shot varies but is determined by the limits of identification. As long as we recognize that the subject framed in close-ups, extreme close-ups, medium shots, and other shot sizes are just portions of the wide shot, the change in scale is permissible. Actually, even this definition must take into account the change in editing styles over several decades. The move from wide shot to close-up was considered too radical a jump for audiences during the first five decades of motion pictures unless a medium shot was used in between. Hollywood editors were forbidden to juxtapose a wide shot with a close-up lest they confuse the audience as to where the close-up was taking place. Today, after several decades of familiarity with Hollywood conventions, and decades of television audiences easily accept extreme changes in scale. If anything, it is likely that the conservative editing rules of the past lagged behind audience understanding.

Visual recognition between shots, however, is only half the strategy of the continuity style. Most often, the relationship between shots is one of implication or inference. For example, we see a wide shot of a man approaching a door. This is followed by a cut to an extreme close-up of the man’s hand turning the doorknob. Even if the doorknob was too small to attract our attention in the wide shot, we *expect* that it is connected to the previous shot since it makes logical sense, even though we could be looking at another doorway in a different place and time. Narrative logic and the visual connection between shots cooperate to create a sense of continuous space. This pair of ideas, cause and effect and spatial recognition, provide the organizational basis of the continuity style.

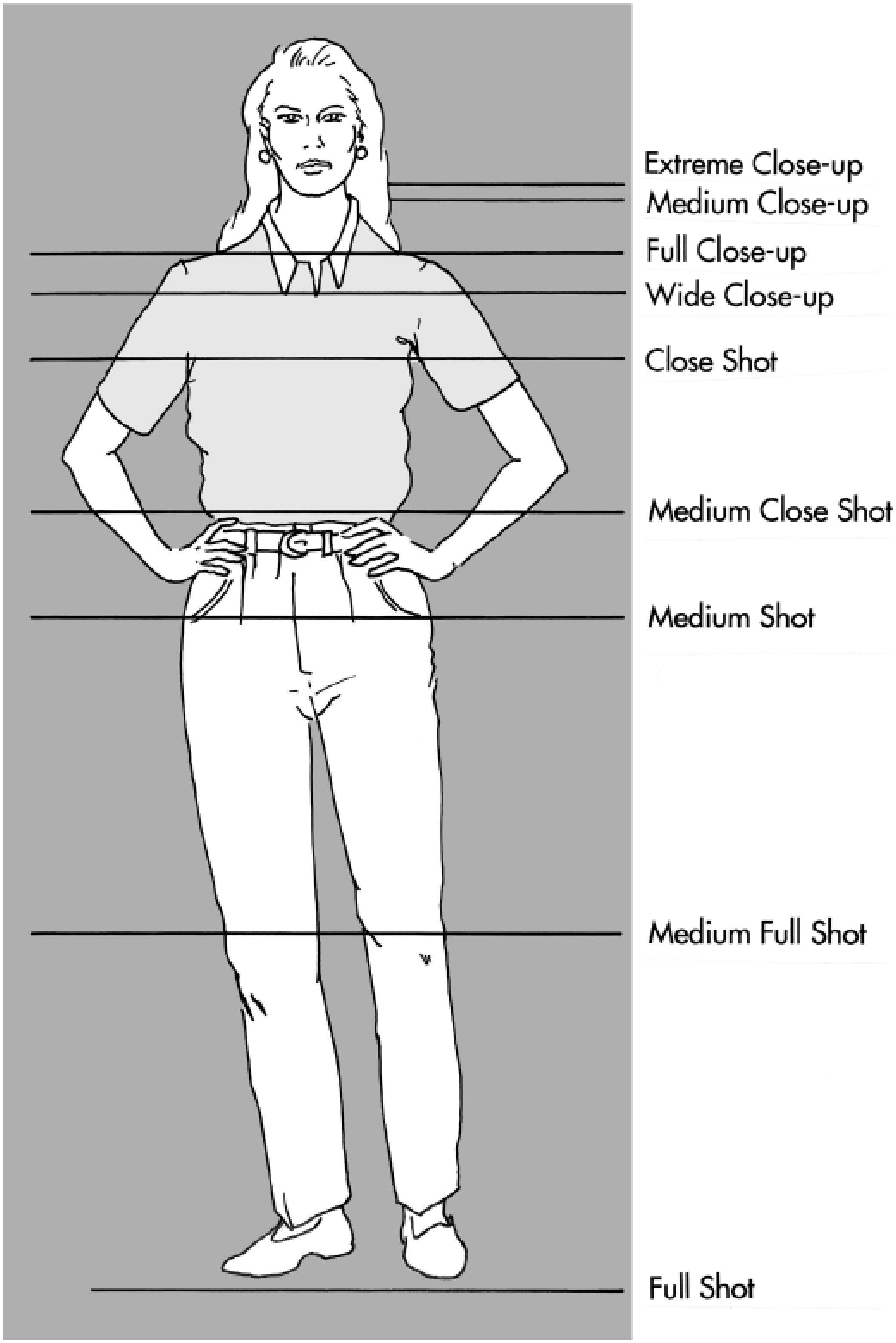

Extreme Close-up
Medium Close-up
Full Close-up
Wide Close-up
Close Shot
Medium Close Shot
Medium Shot
Medium Full Shot
Full Shot

Figure 6.1: Basic framing heights for the human figure

Long shots, medium shots, and close-ups can describe any subject or location but are most often used to describe the human figure. The terms take on special meaning in this connection. Here the change in scale between shots is not related by logic or visual recognition alone. Instead, framing is determined by conventions of post-Renaissance art, or what are generally considered pleasing and balanced compositions.

The Close-Up

Television has greatly increased the use of the close-up. To compensate for the small size of the screen compared to a movie theater, the close-up is used to bring us into closer contact with the action. For dialogue sequences, the shoulder-and-head shot has become the predominant framing. Cost-minded producers like the tighter shots because they are easier to light and can be joined to almost any other shot, reducing the amount of coverage needed. The preference for the close-up has been carried over to feature films as more and more film directors graduate from television to the big screen.

In film, the eyes have it. Jean-Luc Godard once said that the most natural cut is the cut on the look. The powerful suggestiveness of this gesture helps explain film's love affair with winks, glances, stares, tears, squints, glares, and the whole range of language that the eyes command. The eyes are perhaps the most expressive feature of the human face, communicating silently what the mouth must do largely with words and sounds. A look can tell us that an object out of frame is of interest, and it can tell us in which direction the object is located. In the same way that the focal length of the lens and the angle of the camera can place the viewer in a definite relationship with the subjects on the screen, the eyeline of a subject clearly determines spatial relations in the scene space. Viewers are particularly sensitive to incongruities in the sight lines between subjects who are looking at each other. In most situations, they can easily detect when the eye match is even slightly off. The use of lens-axis teleprompters has come about largely because audiences are aware when a performer is looking at a cue card that is only a few inches off the camera's optical axis.

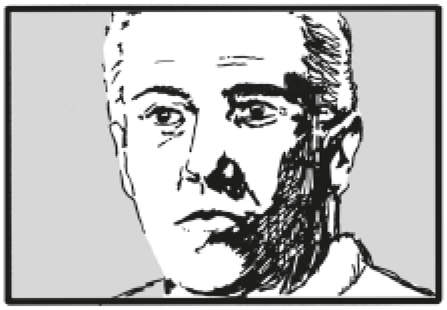
The close-up can bring us into a more intimate relationship with the subjects on the screen than we would normally have with anyone but our closest friends or family. Sometimes this capacity for inspection can be overdone, and the close-up becomes a violation of privacy by forcing a degree of intimacy that should only be shared by consent. The camera, however, does not require consent, particularly if it's equipped with a telephoto lens. Television news cameramen frequently pry into the lives of families during moments of grief, using extreme close-ups. Viewers may find themselves uncomfortable watching scenes that they would normally have the tact to turn away from in their daily lives.

In every culture, there are customs of privacy, physical contact, and accepted behavior based on the distances permitted between people in various situations. A filmmaker can use the camera to record these social distances in such a way that we react to them as if they were happening within our own personal space. Not only can the close-up reveal the intimate, it can make us feel as if we are intruding on moments of privacy or sharing a moment of vulnerability — as if the person on the screen has opened himself up to us. We can be made to feel detachment or an emotional involvement with events and subjects on the screen largely through the manipulation of space with the lens of the camera.

Figure 6.2 features a series of eight close-up framings in three aspect ratios: Academy aperture, which is the same as 16 mm and television (1.33:1); widescreen (1.85:1); and the anamorphic CinemaScope process (2.35:1).

The images are shown in pairs as they might appear together in a sequence because the balance or imbalance of any frame is dependent on the shots that come before and after it. In the first two frames, the subjects are positioned dead center. If you move your eyes over these frames, "reading" them as though they were edited, you will see that there is no rhythm in the shot change since the eyes remain focused on the center of the screen. Compare this with frames 3 and 4. Here the off-center compositions in alternate close-ups create a left/right eye motion that is dynamic. This effect becomes more pronounced as the width of the screen increases. Here we have a good example of what is meant by sequential art, since compositions are not judged individually but by how they combine in a sequence.

Conventions in Western art favor portraits that position the human face slightly off-center to avoid disturbing symmetrical compositions. The customary solution is to leave extra space on the side of the screen the subject is looking at and more space at the bottom of the frame than at the top. In film, the use of off-center compositions becomes more common as the screen widens. But don't let this stand in the way of experimentation.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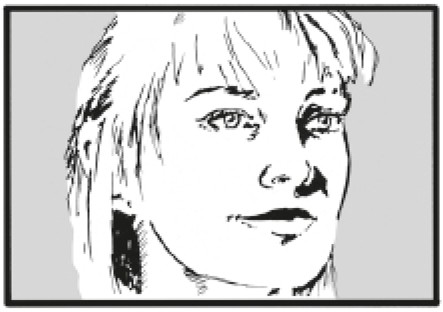
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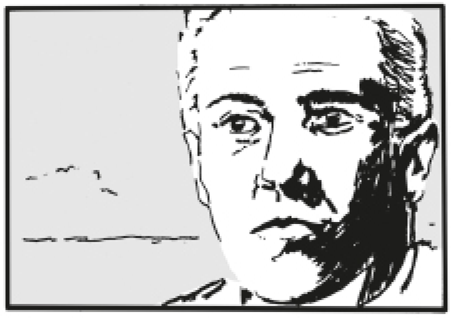
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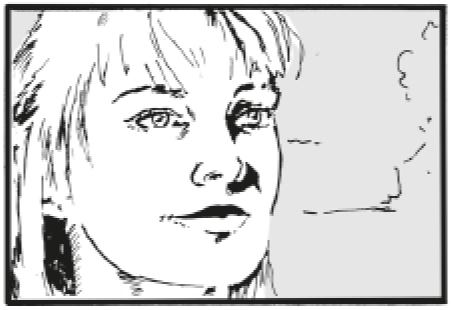
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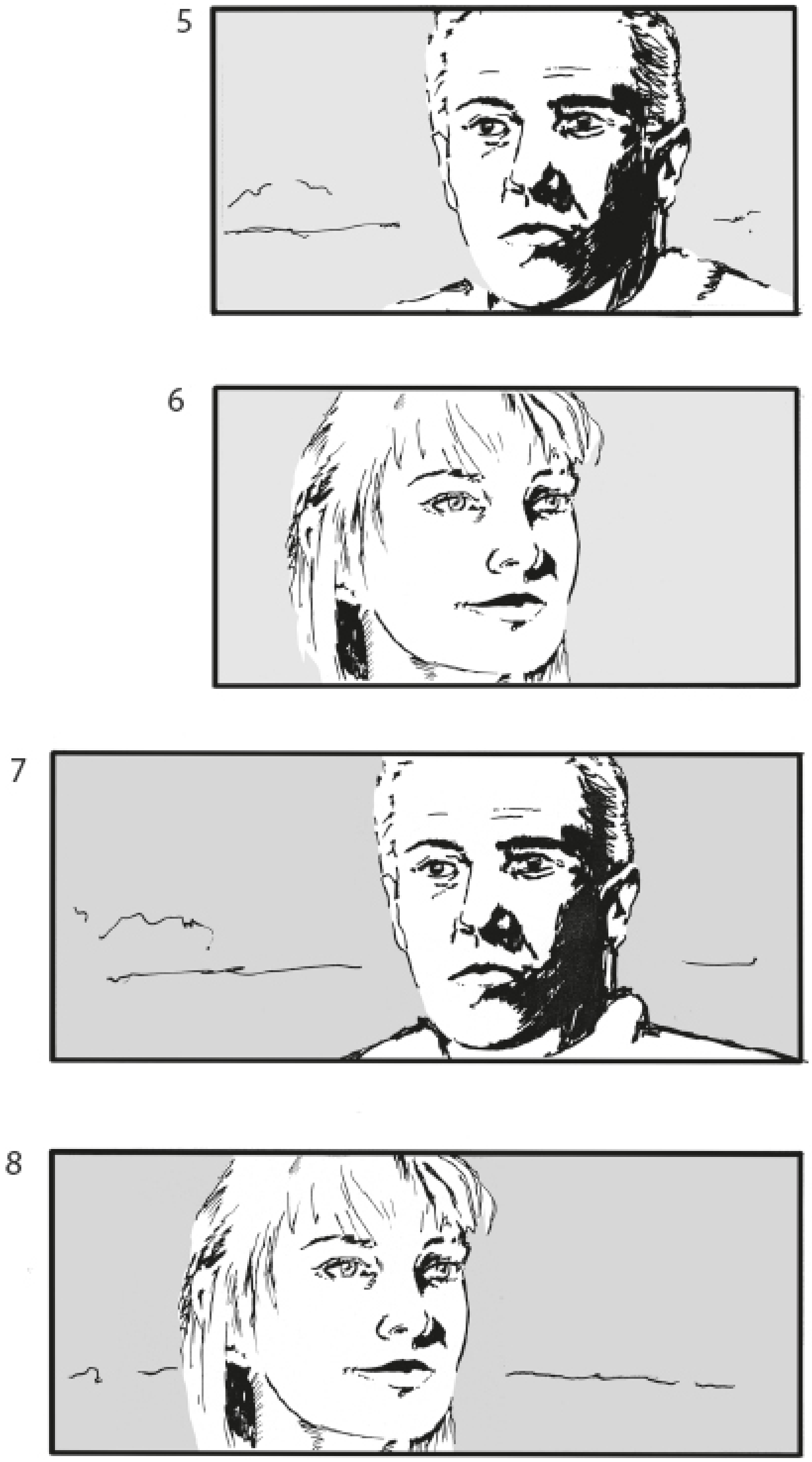
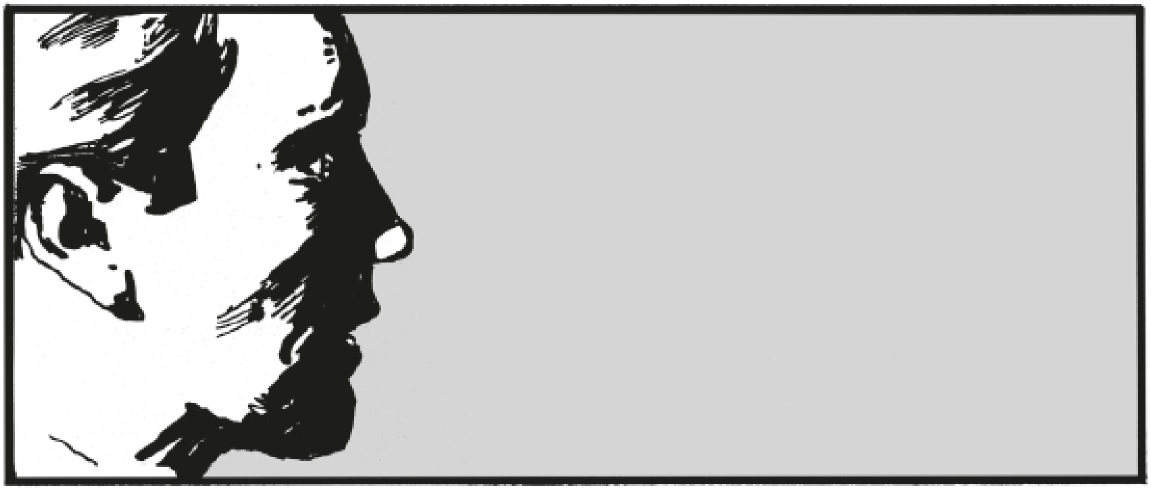


Figure 6.2

There is no reason for filmmakers to accept these limitations if they do not suit their sense of design. The following examples illustrate common and uncommon framing proportions.

Extreme use of screen width is possible as shown in Figure 6.3, illustrating unconventional treatments of portrait composition. Sharply off-center framing is possible in any aspect ratio, though the effect becomes more pronounced the wider the screen. This type of composition has become quite common in television commercials recently, influenced by print graphics in advertising. This has had a subtle influence on the movies, which tend to absorb techniques from the other arts.

The eyes, mouth, and ears are frequently given extreme close-ups of their own, usually to advance some specific part of the narrative. For example, a shot of a woman walking home alone at night on a lonely street might be followed by an extreme close-up of her ear, as faint footsteps are heard. A similar setup might utilize a close-up of her eyes indicating her fear. These are familiar devices, and there are many more ways that you can utilize macro close-ups if you begin to experiment. Three versions of extreme and macro close-ups are shown in Figure 6.4 on page 136. In all cases, the viewpoint was from the front or side of the face favoring the features. This is just one more convention that need not limit your individual style. Unconventional viewpoints, framing, and shot size can be used to explore portraiture through texture, light, and the infinite varieties of form. This does not mean that you have to give up traditional methods. They are by no means exhausted creatively, and can be as communicative, startling, and moving as more experimental techniques.



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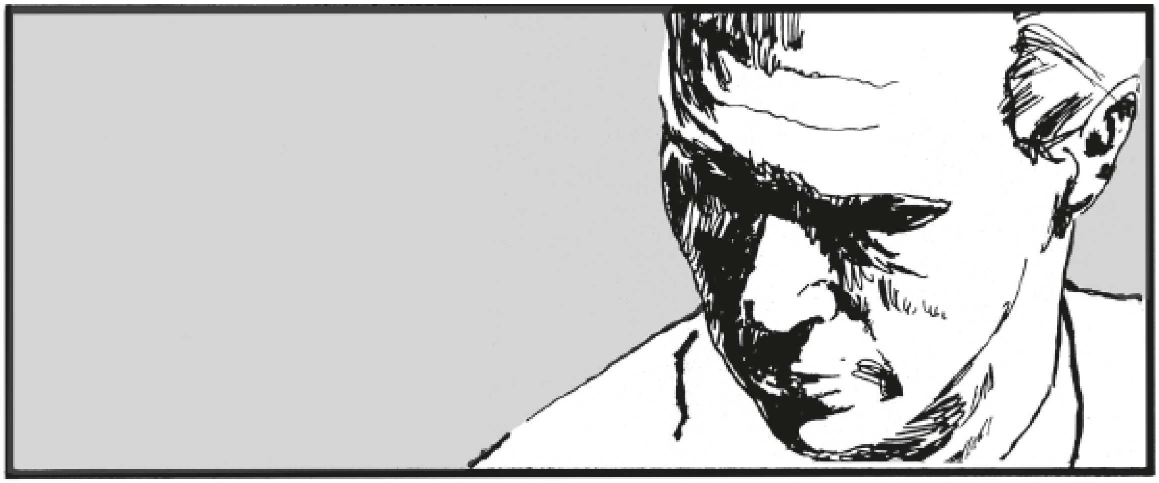

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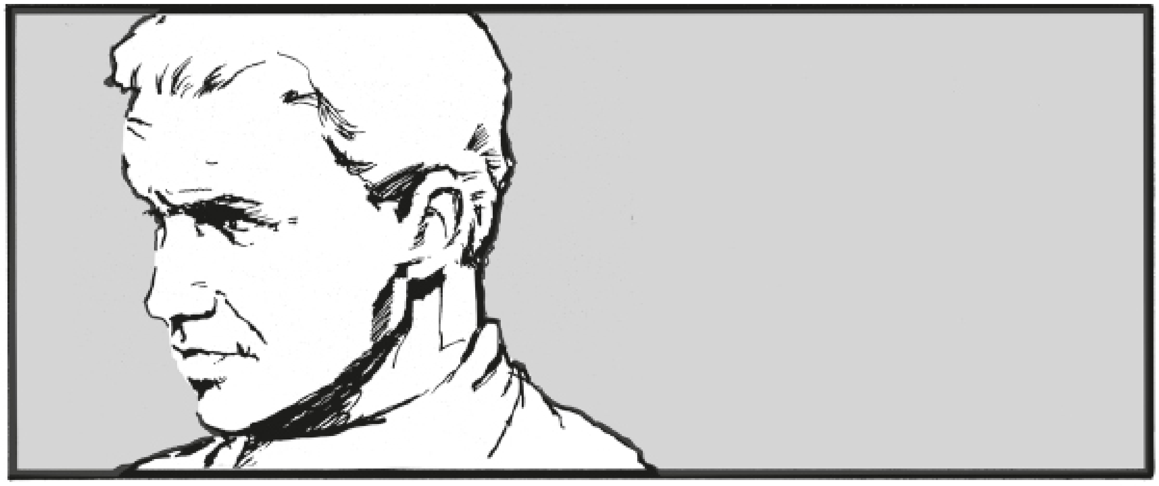

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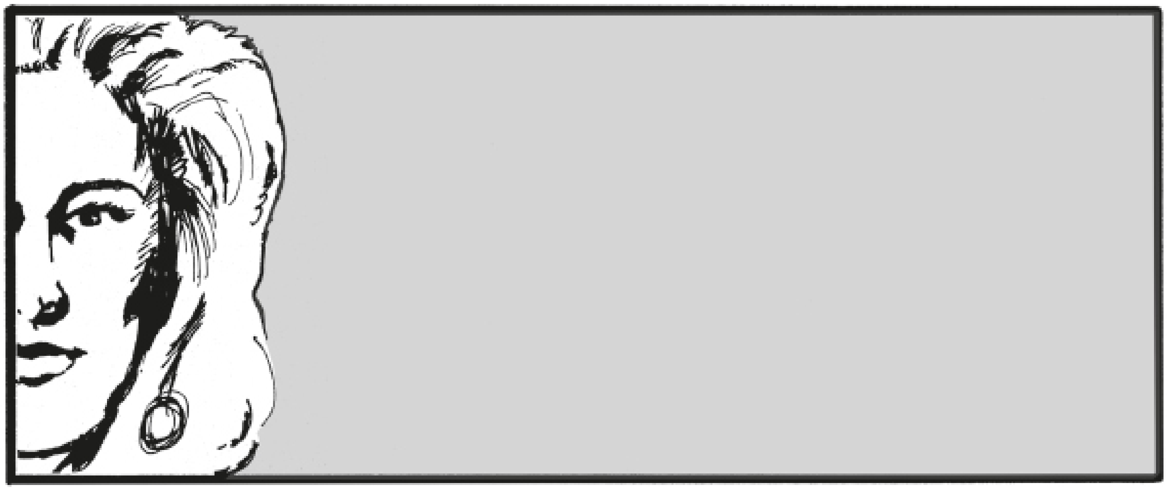

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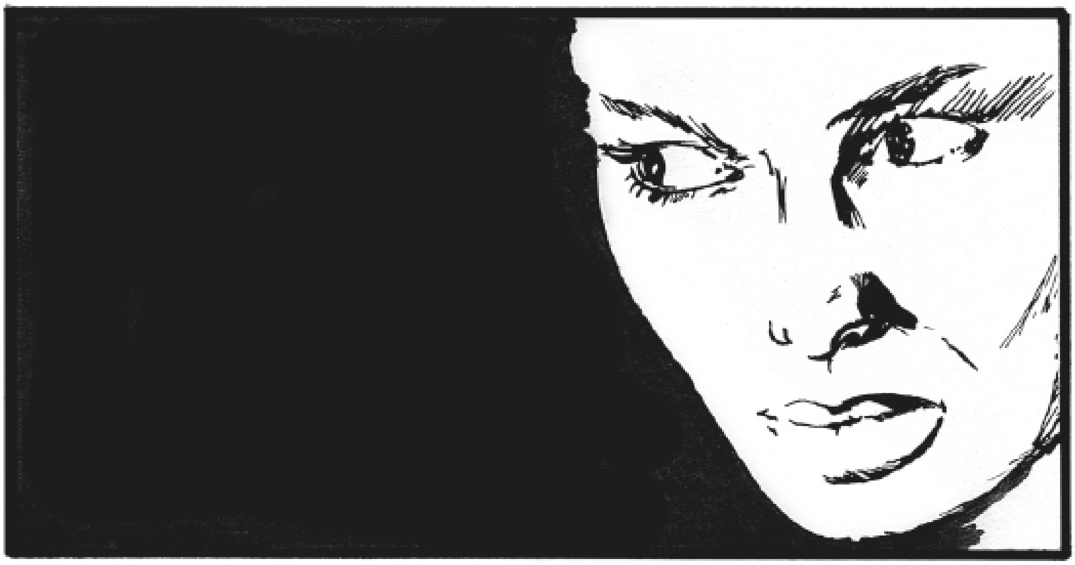

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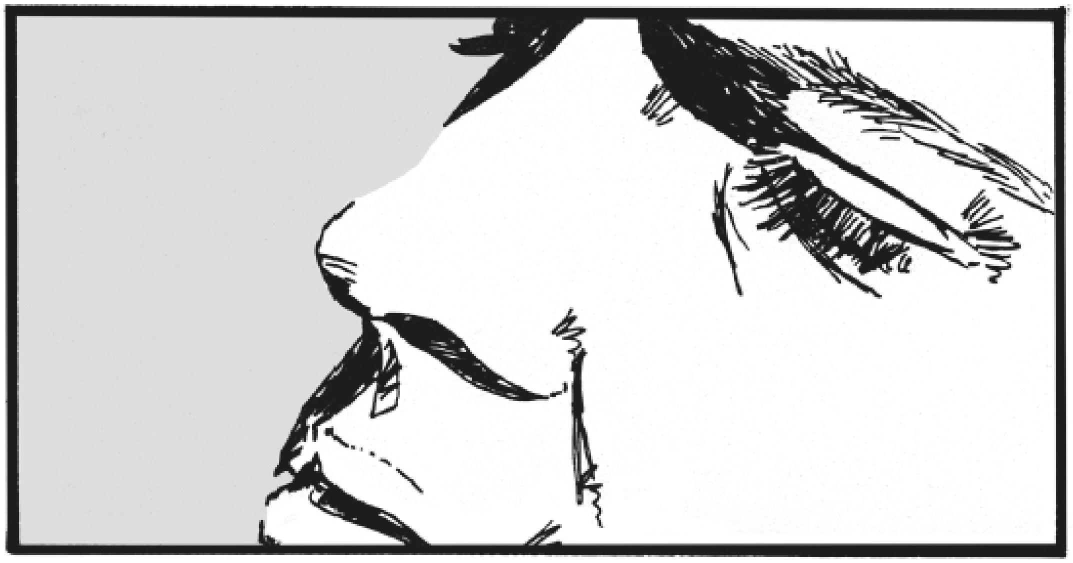

Figure 6.3

The Medium Shot

Before television began emphasizing the use of the close-up and extreme close-up, the medium shot was the workhorse for dialogue scenes throughout the sound period. Combining valuable qualities of the full shot and the close-up, it is still widely employed in television and feature films. Like the full shot, the medium shot captures an actor's gestures and body language, but is still tight enough to include subtle variations in facial expression.

The medium shot is also the general range in which group shots are composed for dialogue scenes. The two-shot, three-shot, four-shot, or five-shot are the typical groupings. With more than five players in the frame, the camera often must pull back into the full-shot range to include everyone if the figures are not significantly overlapped. The medium shot shares the honors with the close-up for popularity at the present time but only insofar as it is used in conjunction with close-ups — not as the primary setup for a scene. We will pass over examples of medium shots in this section and cover them in depth later in the workshop section of the book.

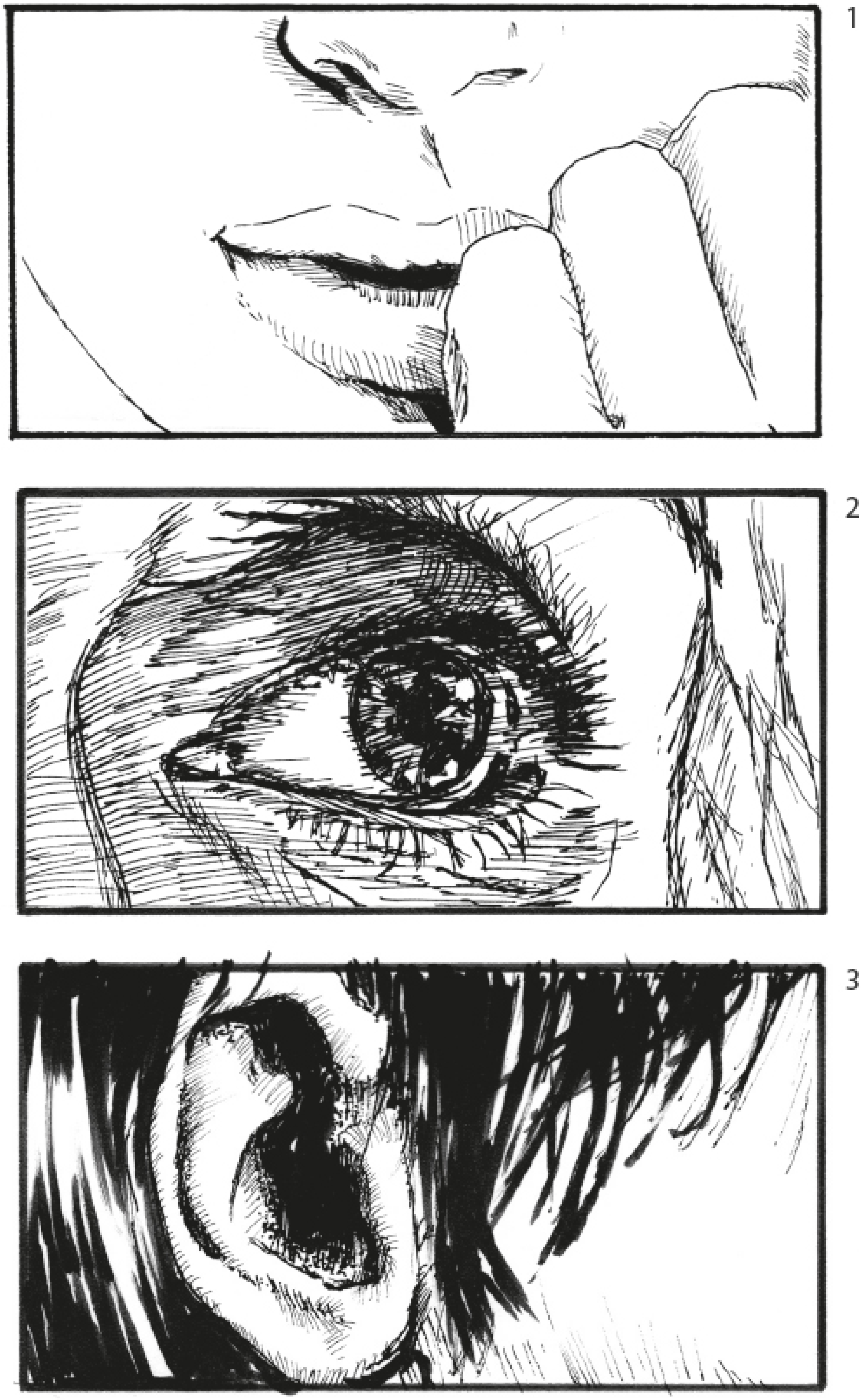

Figure 6.4: Basic framing heights for the human figure

The Full Shot

The full shot as an alternative to the medium or close-up has fallen into disuse in the last twenty years, relegated to the function of an establishing shot when it is necessary to connect a character and a location in a single shot. Filmmakers seem to be reluctant to play a scene wide if a close-up or medium shot can be substituted. One of the reasons the full shot is underused is that it requires dialogue scenes to be played in long takes. This is because the full shot usually frames all the speaking characters in a scene, making a cutting pattern of medium and close-up shots unnecessary. If the long shot is used with these two tighter framings, the editing pattern invariably moves in close and does not return to the full shot. While the medium and long shots can encompass the action in a scene without resorting to other shots to fulfill the narrative, a close-up generally must be accompanied by other close-up, medium, or full shots to fulfill the narrative requirements of a scene.

One of the full shot’s most attractive qualities is that it allows the actor to use body language. This type of physical expression has all but disappeared from the movies since the silent period. Again, television and tight-fisted producers are to blame since there is nothing as inexpensive to shoot or to light as the close-up. This is most clear in the way dance is photographed in music videos, which rarely show the full figure in extended shots.

Compositionally, the long shot of a single figure offers many of the same opportunities for asymmetrical framing as the close-up. The vertical line of the standing figure easily fits into designs that stress graphic patterns, particularly in the wider formats.

Figure 6.5 on page 138 features two full shots illustrating frame balance. Slightly off-center framing is so common today that the more conservatively framed centered subject is nearly as powerful as a drastically decentered composition.

The Line of Action

The general approach in this book is to encourage the development of solutions that are adapted to the individual preferences of the filmmaker. Many of the solutions that will be shown are part of recognizable strategies, but the filmmaker's personal vision can at any time overrule systems, accepted practice, traditional wisdom, or convention. Having said that, we can look at the most basic rule of camera placement that the continuity system observes: the line of action.

The purpose of the line of action is quite simple: It organizes camera angles to preserve consistent screen direction and space. It's also useful for organizing the shooting plan. Because the set has to be relit every time the camera is moved to a new angle, it makes sense to gang shots sharing a similar angle of view together, so that they can be shot at one time. This avoids having to light any camera position more than once.

We can think of the line of action as an imaginary partition running through the space in front of the camera. It was originally devised to make sure that if multiple angles of a scene were shot, they could be cut together without a confusing reversal of left and right screen direction. This way, subjects moving through the frame in one shot continue in the same direction in a subsequent shot. The line of action is also called the "180-degree rule" or the "axis of action," illustrated in Figure 6.6 on page 139. To maintain consistent screen direction of the two people seated at the table, the continuity system proposes that an imaginary line of action be drawn between them. The direction of the line can be anywhere the filmmaker chooses, but it is usually the line of sight between subjects featured in a scene. Once the line is determined, a working space of 180 degrees (the gray semicircle) is established. For any scene or sequence, only camera positions within the established semicircle are permitted. The result is that the screen direction of any shots obtained from one side of the line will be consistent with each other. This is illustrated in Figure 6.7, which shows the shots obtained with cameras A, B, and C of Figure 6.6. Camera positions that are outside the gray working space are said to be *across the line* or *over the line*. Figure 6.8 shows what happens if we edit shots from both sides of the line together, in this case, cameras A and F. The result is that the man is looking at the back of the woman's head.

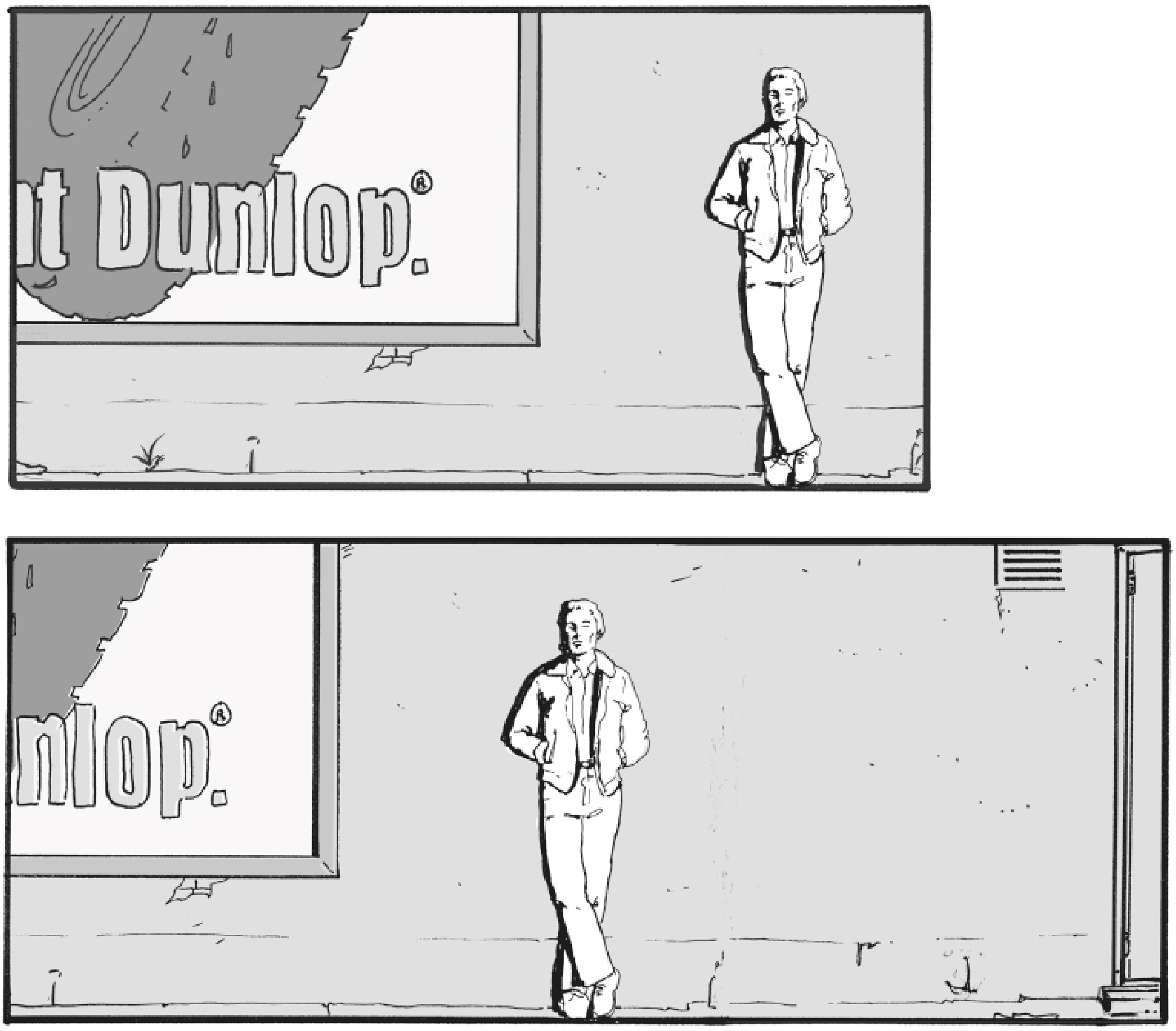
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Figure 6.5: Frame balance

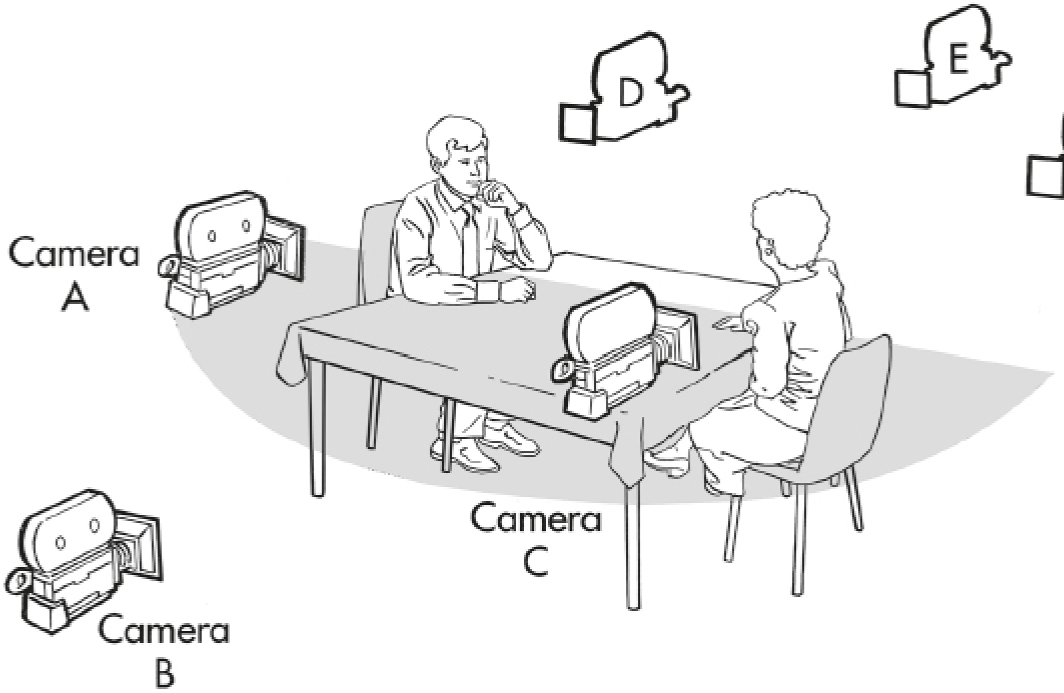
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Figure 6.6

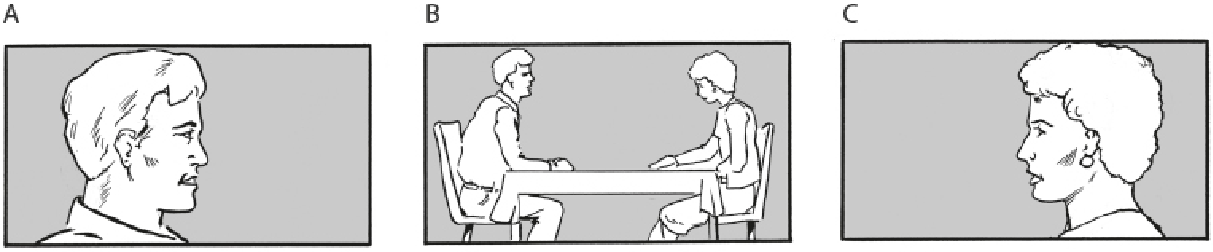


Figure 6.7

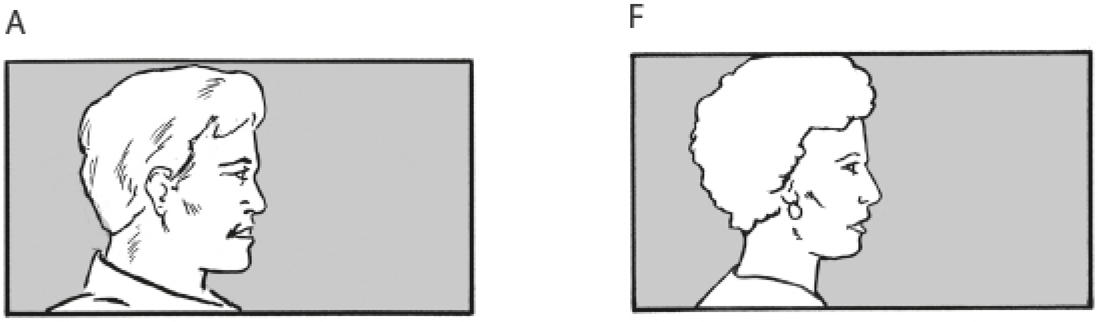


Figure 6.8

The Triangle System

When the line of action is in use, another convention, the triangle system of camera placement, is a shorthand way of describing camera positions on one side of the line. The system proposes that all the basic shots possible for any subject can be taken from three points within the 180-degree working space. Connecting the three points, we have a triangle of variable shape and size, depending on the placement of the cameras. Any shot can be joined to any other shot in the triangle system of setups. The system includes all the basic shot sizes and camera angles used for dialogue scenes in the continuity style. The triangle system is employed for all types of situations, including single subjects and action scenes. It is used extensively for live television programs such as quiz shows, sports programs, and sitcoms. Even though three cameras are pictured in the following examples, a single camera can be moved to each point along the triangle and the different setups obtained individually. This is often the case in feature films. However, the triangle system lends itself to the multiple camera setup as long as extensive staging or camera movement is not required. This would create the problem of one camera moving in front of another. There are five basic camera setups that can be obtained within the triangle: Angular singles (medium shots or close-ups), master two-shots, over-the-shoulder shots, point-of-view singles (medium shots or close-ups), and profile shots.

In Figure 6.9, camera positions A and C are angular shots of the two subjects seated at the table. Position B is a two-shot. The framings accompanying each camera position, of course, could be varied, and the shot size for cameras A and C can be any size from an extreme close-up to a full shot.

Figure 6.10 is the second triangle setup for over-the-shoulder shots. Cameras A and C are moved into the over-the-shoulder position. Camera B always obtains the two-shot as in Figure 6.9 and so is not included in the subsequent examples. Variations are only obtained with the outside or wing camera positions.

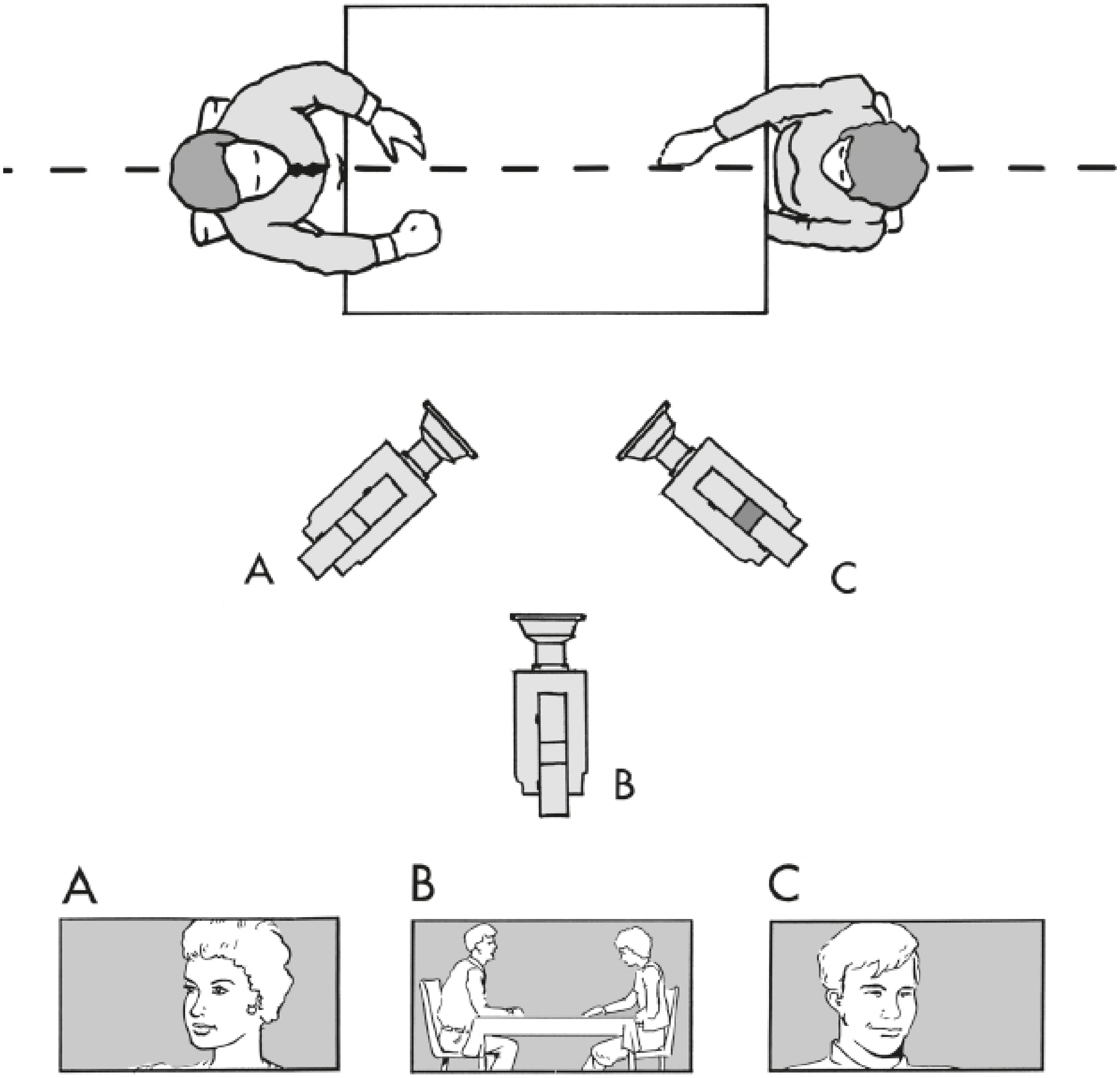


Figure 6.9

OVER-THE-SHOULDER SHOTS

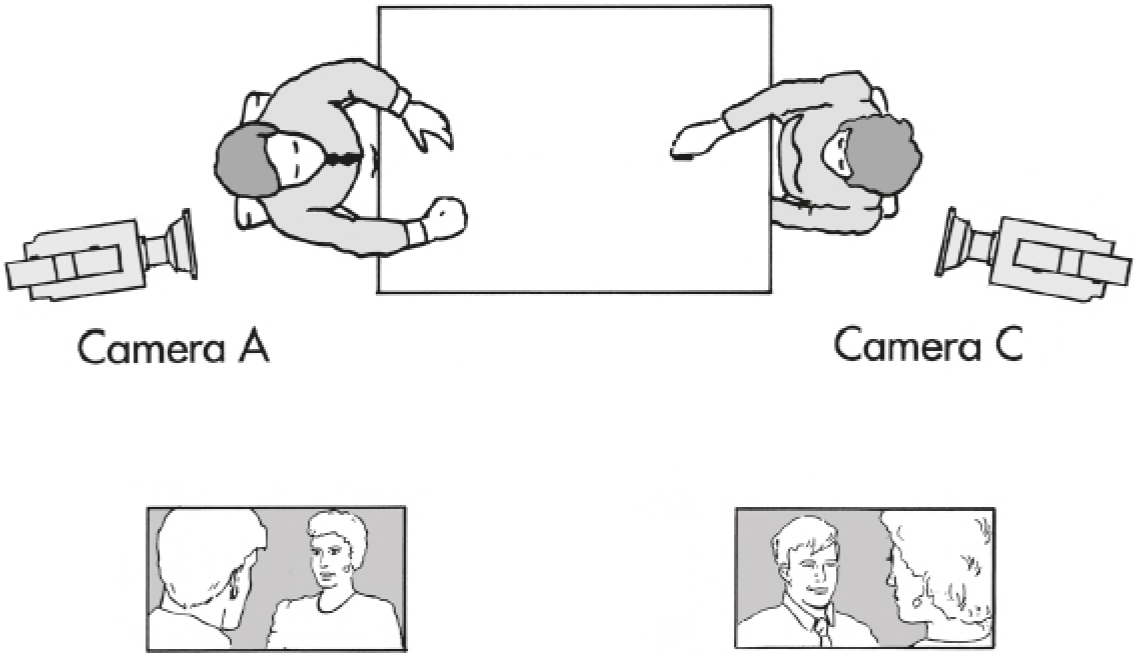


Figure 6.10

In the setup pictured in Figure 6.11, cameras A and C have been moved just inside the line of action or, more appropriately, the line of sight of the subjects. Camera positions A and C are now used to obtain close-ups from each subject's point of view. In this case, the subject not being photographed would be moved out of the way to place the camera in position. This is indicated by the broken line.

POINT OF VIEW CLOSE-UPS

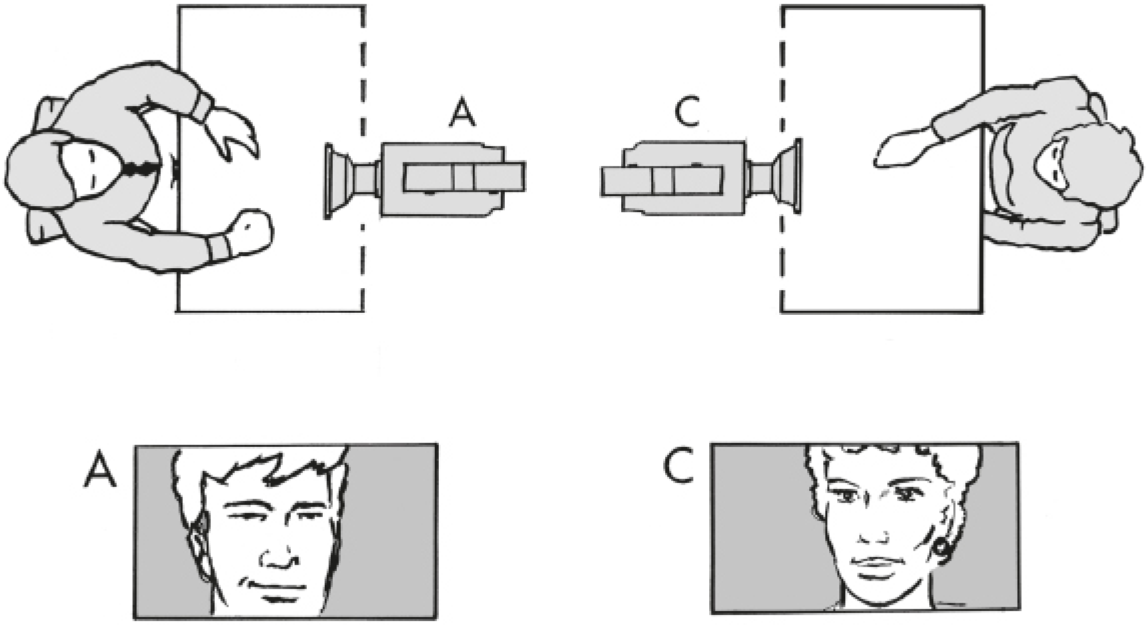


Figure 6.11

Figure 6.12 shows the last possible setup within the triangle method profile shots using cameras A and C. Naturally, the exact angle of the shot, composition, and shot size are infinitely variable within the triangle as long as the line of action is not violated.

PROFILE SHOTS

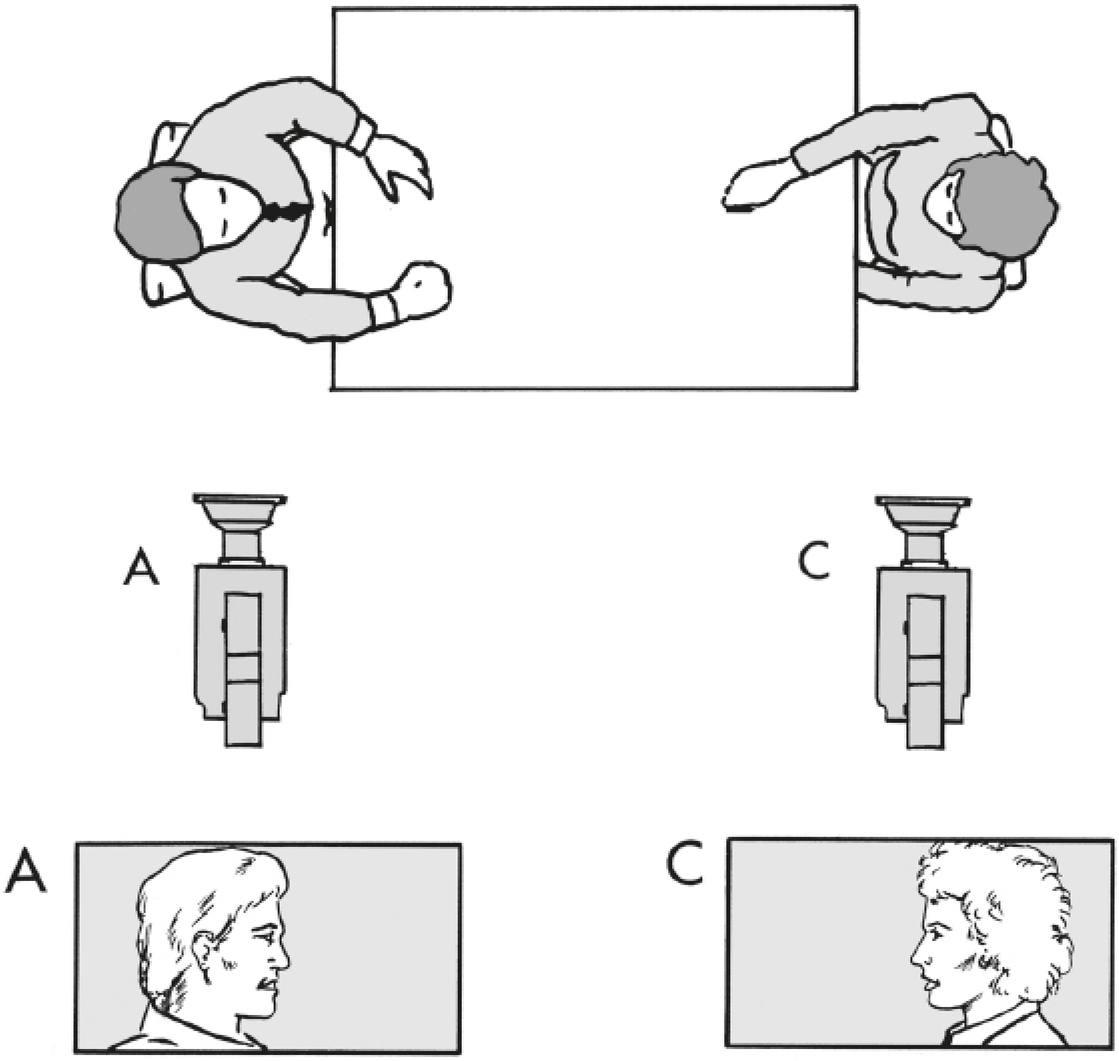


Figure 6.12

Establishing a New Line of Action With a New Sight Line

The only time the camera is permitted to cross the line of action is when a new line is established. One way to do this is shown in Figure 6.13. In this example, the old line is established between the couple seated at the table. A second man approaches the table and the seated man turns his attention to him. This new line of sight establishes a new line of action and a corresponding 180-degree working space for the camera. This is indicated by the gray semicircle. The establishment of a new line is usually set up with a shot of a person who turns his attention to a new area or person within the frame. This *pivot shot* joins the two lines of action.

Once the new line of action has been set up, the camera can move across the old line of action anywhere within the new working space as long *as the sight line remains with the two men*. You will notice that this space also includes the woman. Even though it is permissible under the 180-degree rule, a camera will not be placed in quadrant X to photograph the woman. The next time she is seen in a shot, the camera will be located according to the *old line of action*. This is called a reestablishing shot. Conventional wisdom advocates reusing lines of action and the corresponding camera setups so that a consistent sense of space is reinforced through repetition. Once the basic editing pattern (and shot geography) have been established, a return to an old line of action does not have to be motivated by the pivot shot since the viewer has a general sense of the spatial relationships between actors.

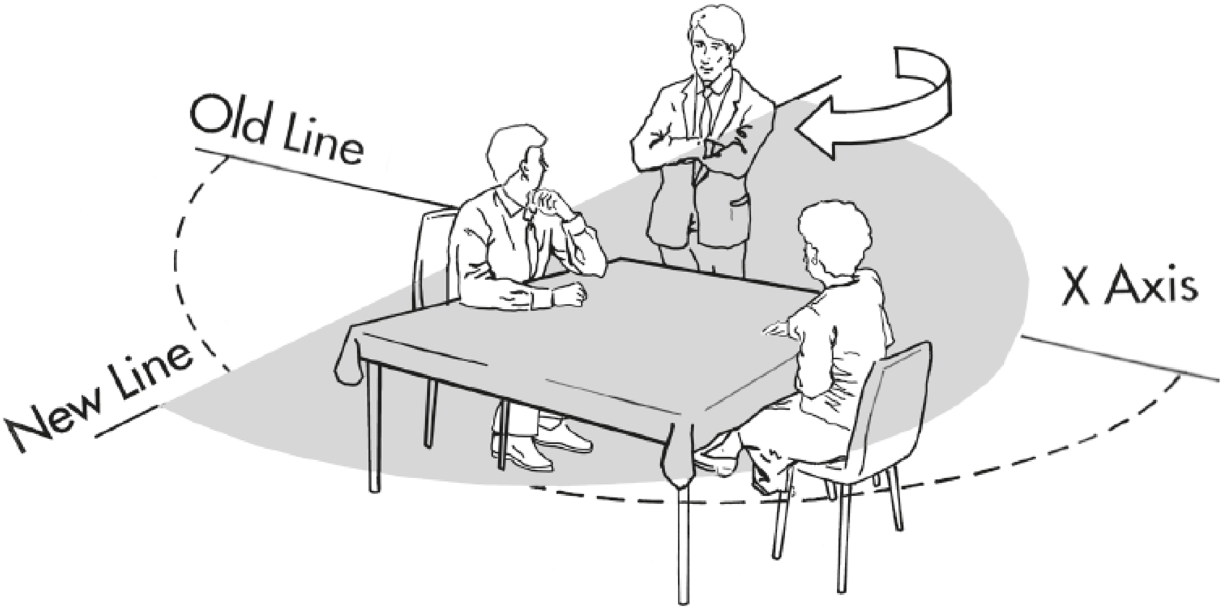


Figure 6.13

The business of changing lines is considerably less complicated in practice. The shooting plan is arranged so that all the shots from a given angle are consolidated even if dialogue is shot out of order. Later, the shots are edited into the proper dramatic sequence. Onscreen, the changing line of action may appear to follow a far more complex scheme than was actually the case.

Establishing a New Line When a Player Crosses the Line

A second method of establishing a new line is to have one of the players in a scene cross his own line of action. This is shown in Figure 6.14 on page 144. As before, the line of action is between the seated couple; the working space for the camera is on the near side of the line A. In Step One, the actor gets up from the table and moves to a new position over the line into space B. As soon as the man reestablishes eye contact with the woman in Step Two, the new line of action is established. The new line overrules the old line, which is no longer in effect. Again, a working space of 180 degrees is created. The only requirement for this strategy is that the actor's relocation must be seen clearly in a shot that permits the viewer to reorient himself.

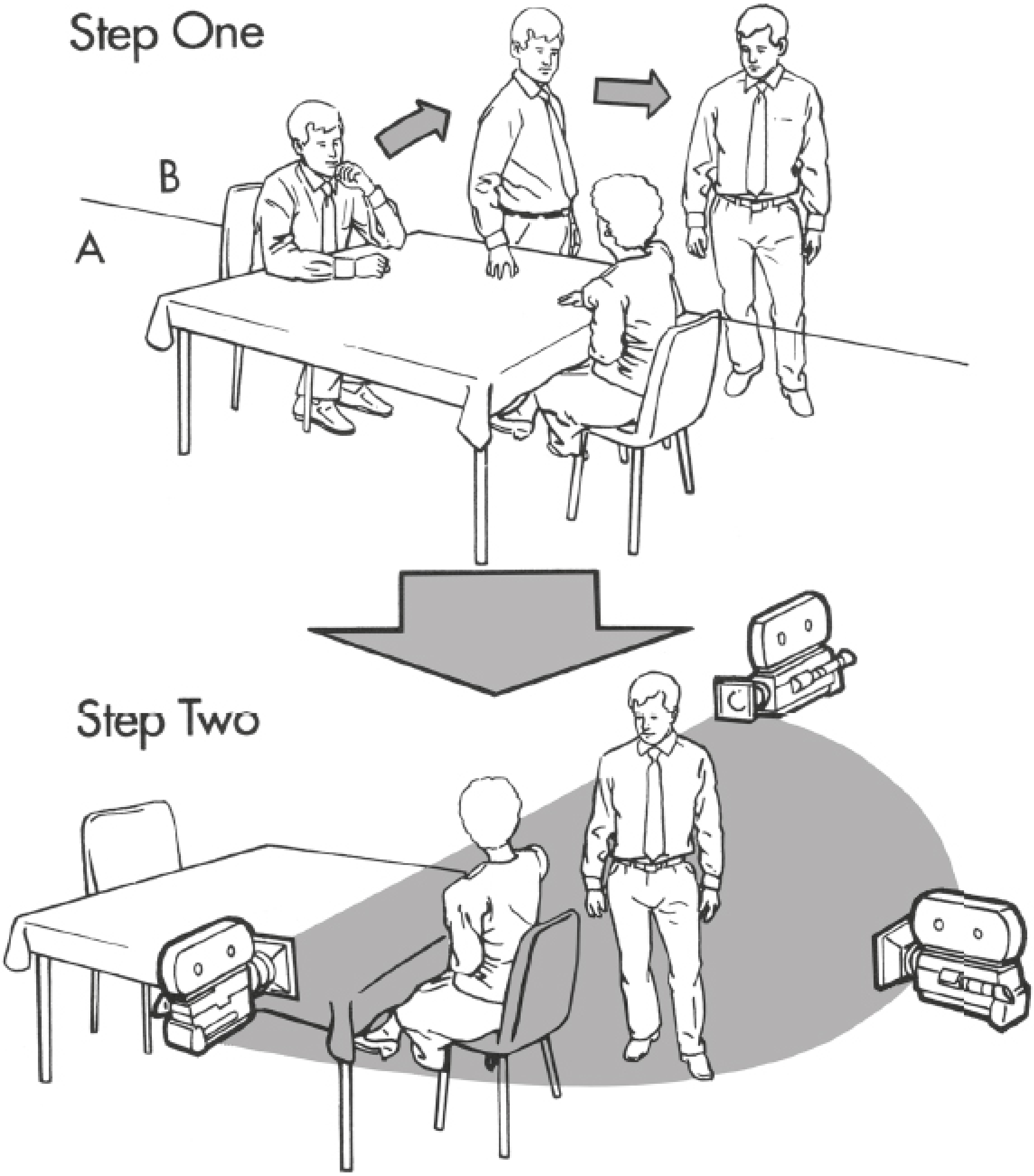


Figure 6.14

Another factor to consider when establishing any new line is which side to use for the camera. Figure 6.15 on page 145 illustrates an alternative setup to the one in Figure 6.14. This time the working space for the camera is on the opposite side of the line. *Either choice is permissible as long as the new space agrees with the pivot shot taken from the previous line of action*. This is shown in Figure 6.16. Part One shows the line of action and corresponding semicircular working space for the camera. The line bisecting the semicircle is the new line of action that will be established when the man moves to the standing position to face the woman. Cameras A and B represent the choices for the pivot shot used to record the man as he moves to the new position. Part Two of the diagram shows the 180-degree working space that you would use if camera position B were used for the pivot shot. Part Three shows the 180-degree working space if camera position A were used for the pivot shot.

As a rule, the working area chosen for each new line of action keeps the camera in the center of the group when shooting dialogue situations at a table or in a confined space.

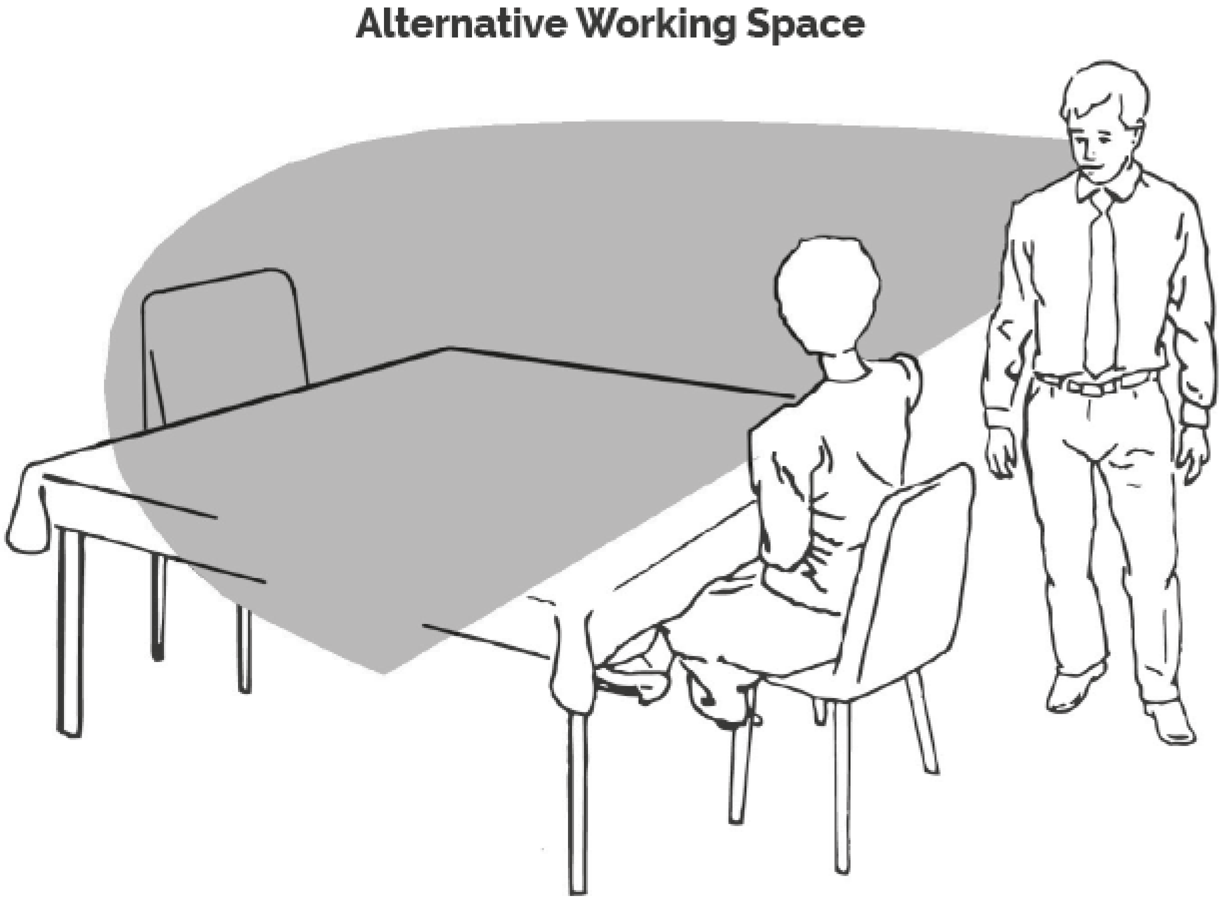


Figure 6.15

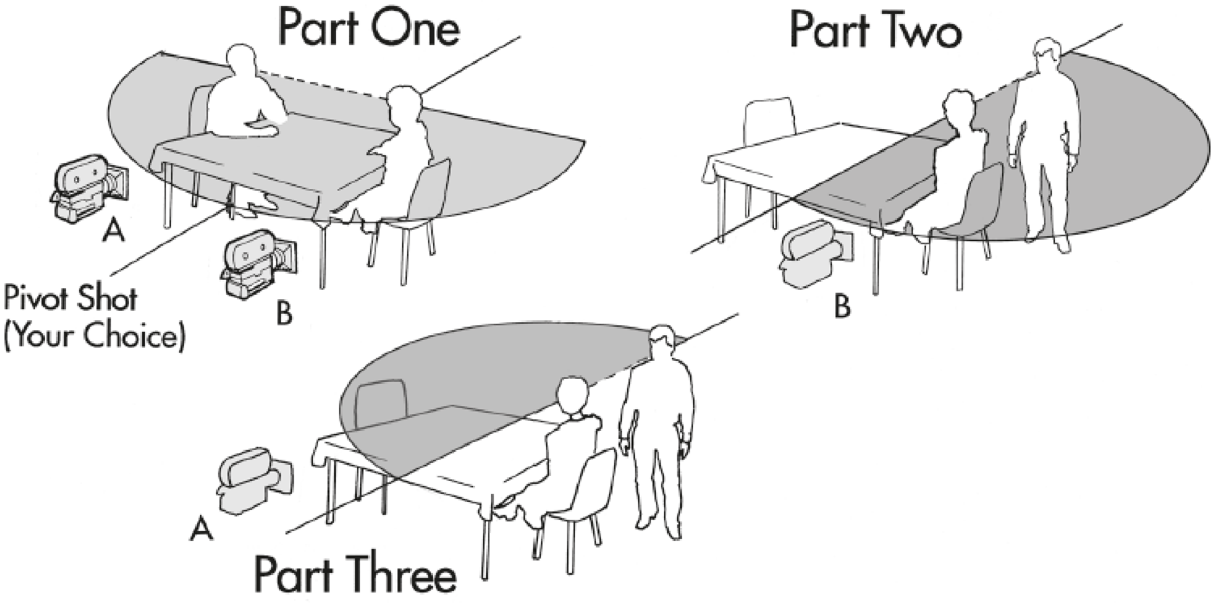


Figure 6.16

Moving the Camera Across the Line

Not only can a player cross the line and establish a new one, but the camera can pan, dolly, or make a crane move to a new space and a new line of action. This is easily accomplished as long as the camera movement is uninterrupted. In this situation, an eyeline does not have to be established and the camera can move from one side of the line of sight between two players to the other without confusion. Figure 6.17 shows one version of this strategy with a curved camera path (black dotted line) crossing the line of action.

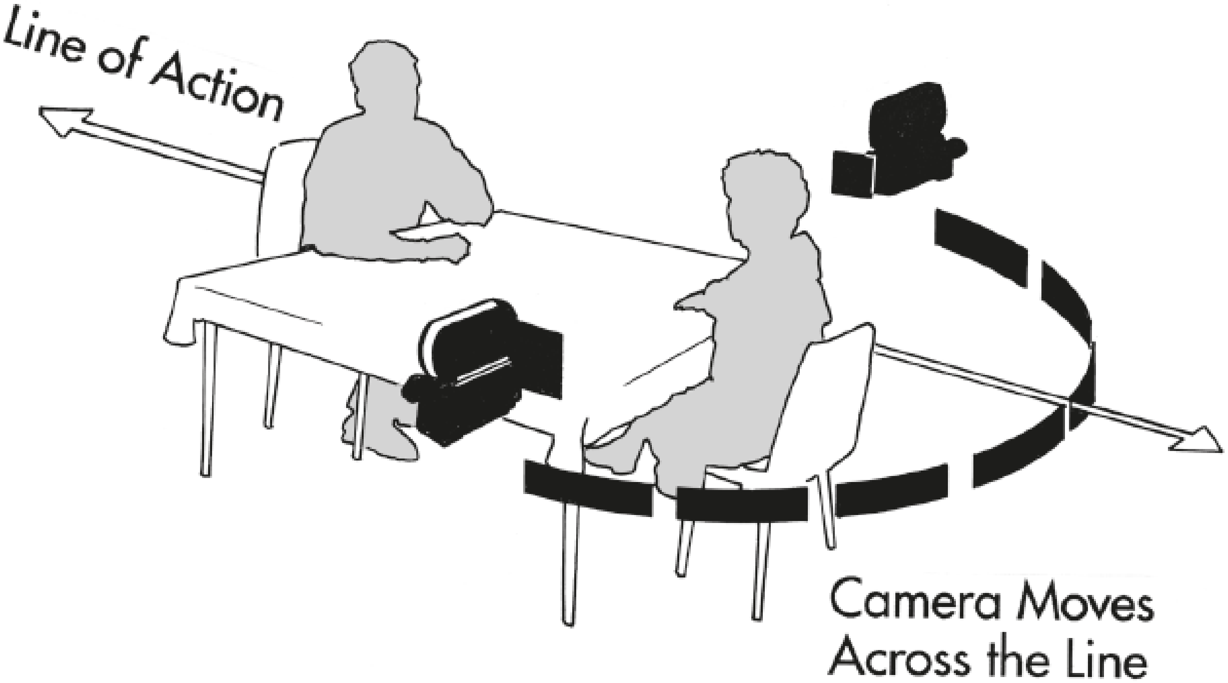


Figure 6.17

Cutaways and Bridge Shots

Another way to cross the line to another part of the scene is to interrupt the geography of a sequence with a shot that is clearly related to the action, but not the geography of the scene. For instance, let's say that we have established the line of action in a scene in the classroom of a school. We want to cross the line, but none of the strategies we have looked at in previous examples will work within the action of the scene. In this case, we photograph a close-up of a student's notebook or other pertinent detail. This cutaway serves the same purpose as the pivot shot. When we return to the main action, the camera can be moved over the line and a new line established. This solution is generally used as a quick fix in the editing process when problems of continuity arise.

The Line of Action for Moving Subjects and Action

In my opinion, the line of action is most useful when used to organize the photography of multiple-player dialogue sequences. Though screen direction would seem to be crucial to understanding the relationship of fast-moving subjects — for instance, cars in a chase sequence — unquestioning observance of the line of action may actually stand in the way of more interesting arrangements of shots. For one thing, continuity editing is not the only way of organizing film images: Other methods, such as kinetic or analytical editing, may be in conflict with strict continuity and yet provide better solutions to creative problems. For another, today's viewers are so visually sophisticated that they are able to "read" unconventional editing patterns with relative ease. Be aware that more dynamic results may be obtained in some sequences if the line is crossed and screen direction is reversed. Later we'll be looking at other types of editing more closely, but for now, as we continue to explore the line of action, keep in mind that there are alternative ways of organizing shots.

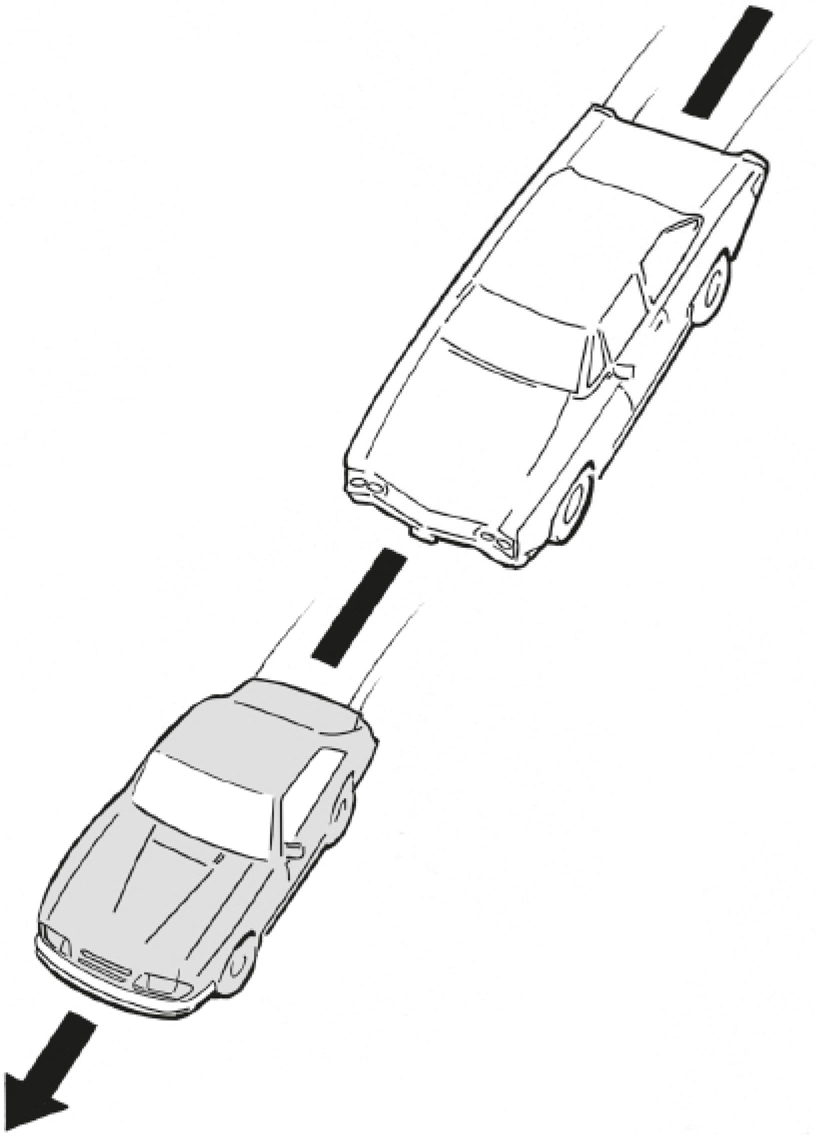


Figure 6.18: Line of action follows direction of motion.

Action Sequences

In action sequences, there is frequently no line of sight to establish the line of action. In this case, the line of action follows the dominant motions of the subject of the shot. If one car is pursuing another, the line is the path of the cars, as shown in Figure 6.18. If the two cars are alongside each other, an *additional* line of action can be established between the cars. I call this the *implied sight line* because even when the drivers of the cars are not prominent in the shot, the cars become the symbols of the drivers and their line of sight. This situation is peculiar to cars, boats, planes, or any other conveyance that has a driver. Both lines are shown in Figure 6.19. Shots photographed from both sides of the line of motion (camera positions A, C and B, D) will result in a reversal of screen direction when cut together, as shown in the accompanying storyboard panels. The implied sight line is a special case and only overrides the line of motion temporarily. Otherwise, the line of motion is the prevailing rule. While this may seem like the type of situation that the 180-degree rule was devised to prevent, it is actually a common editing pattern even in dialogue scenes where there is a line of motion and an implied sight line.

This is the case in *The Godfather Part II* when the young Vito Corleone is driving a small truck along crowded New York streets. Fanucci, the local crime lord, is seated next to Vito, and they have a conversation as the car moves along. Two tracking shots are used, one on each side of the car, framing a good deal of the car and the moving background. Cut together, the shots form a pair of very wide over-the-shoulder shots. Each time there is a cut during the conversation, the background reverses direction. The abruptness of the cut could have been softened if the shots were tighter, so that Vito and Fanucci filled the frame. As it turns out, the shot change is not bothersome, and so stands as an example of the latitude possible within the 180-degree rule.

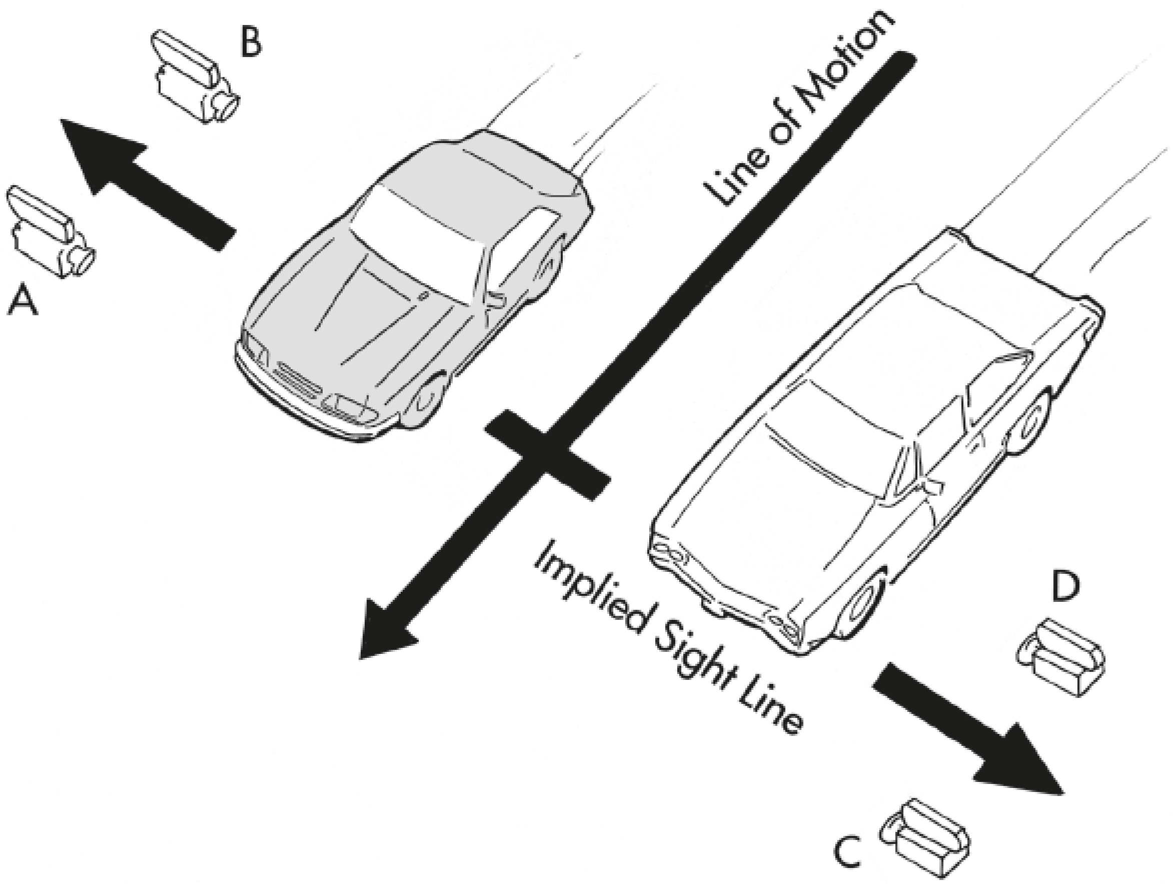
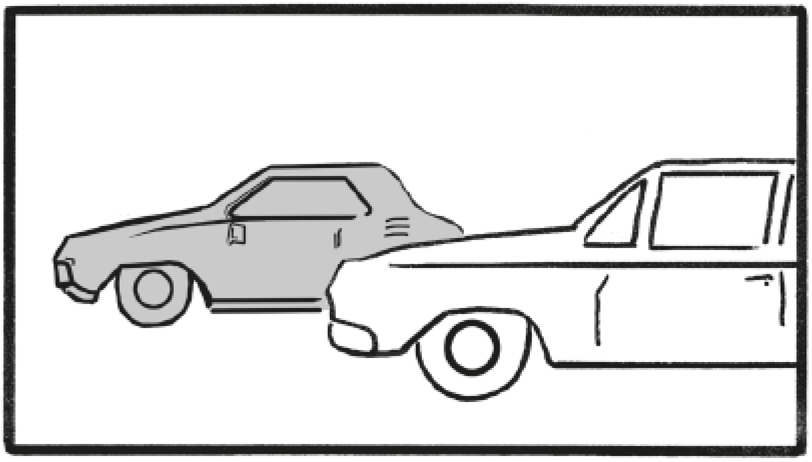
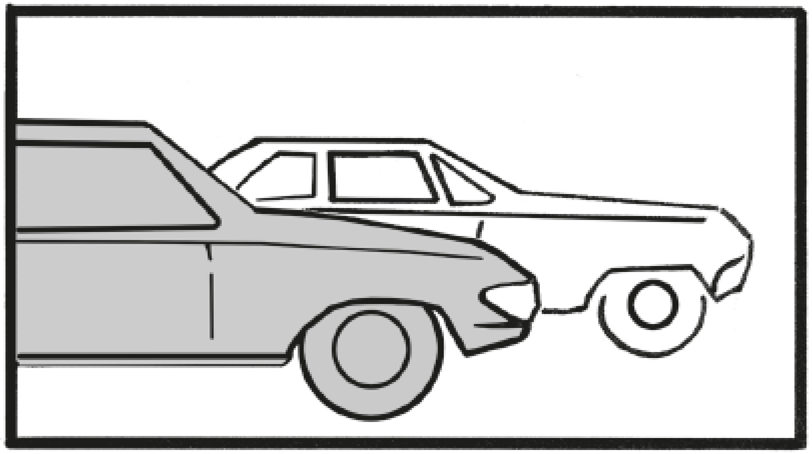

B
A
Line of Motion
Implied Sight Line
D
C

Figure 6.19, Part 1: Two possible lines of action.



Shot from Camera Position C or D



Shot from Camera Position A or B

Figure 6.19, Part 2

Crossing the Line in Action Sequences

The strategies for “properly” crossing the line in nondialogue situations are essentially the same as those illustrated for dialogue scenes, beginning with Figure 6.13, page 143. The only difference is that the principal line of motion is substituted for the sight line. To recap, there are three basic ways to establish a new line of action/motion:

1) A subject (car, horse, person, etc.) can cross the line, establishing a new one by the direction of his new line of motion.
2) The camera can cross the line either following a subject to a new scene space or merely traveling for graphic variety to a new viewpoint.

3) A new subject can enter the frame and become the dominant line of motion in contrast to the first. This is analogous to the situation in Figure 6.13 when a new character entered the scene establishing a new line of sight.

Crossing the Line While on the Line

The closer the camera is to the line of action, the more difficult it is to detect when the camera has crossed the line. In Figure 6.20, camera positions A and B are on the line of action, so when they are edited together there is a reversal of screen direction. This type of sequence would probably have been avoided 60 years ago; but today, audiences have no problem understanding the geography of the scene space in this editing pattern. This reversal is somewhat more startling than is sometimes the case when shooting on the line since the subject is in profile. When the subject's sight line is the same as the line of action, we get front and back views, which help the viewer differentiate the shots.

When actually filming, it's rarely necessary to go through elaborate staging and logistical analysis to find a way of establishing a new line of action. My basic belief is that if the filmmaker has a solid understanding of cinematic geography, has a good overview of the scene, has kept thorough notes on what he is going to shoot and has already shot, then he will probably not encounter any major difficulties with continuity. Even so, on most film shoots there's a script supervisor keeping track of continuity.

Conclusion

The 180-degree rule is only a rule if you accept it. My own feeling is that many of its assumptions are overstated. Audiences have turned out to be far more astute in understanding the spatial relationships in films than they are generally given credit for. Directors like Ozu, Bresson, and Dreyer developed narrative techniques that frequently violate the conventions of continuity filmmaking to achieve their aims. While demanding in other respects, the viewer is not confused by their visual styles. Unlike Godard and the radical film movement, these directors were not reacting against the continuity style, and their visual solutions to thematic concerns are more varied and particular than the often-mannered style of the left.

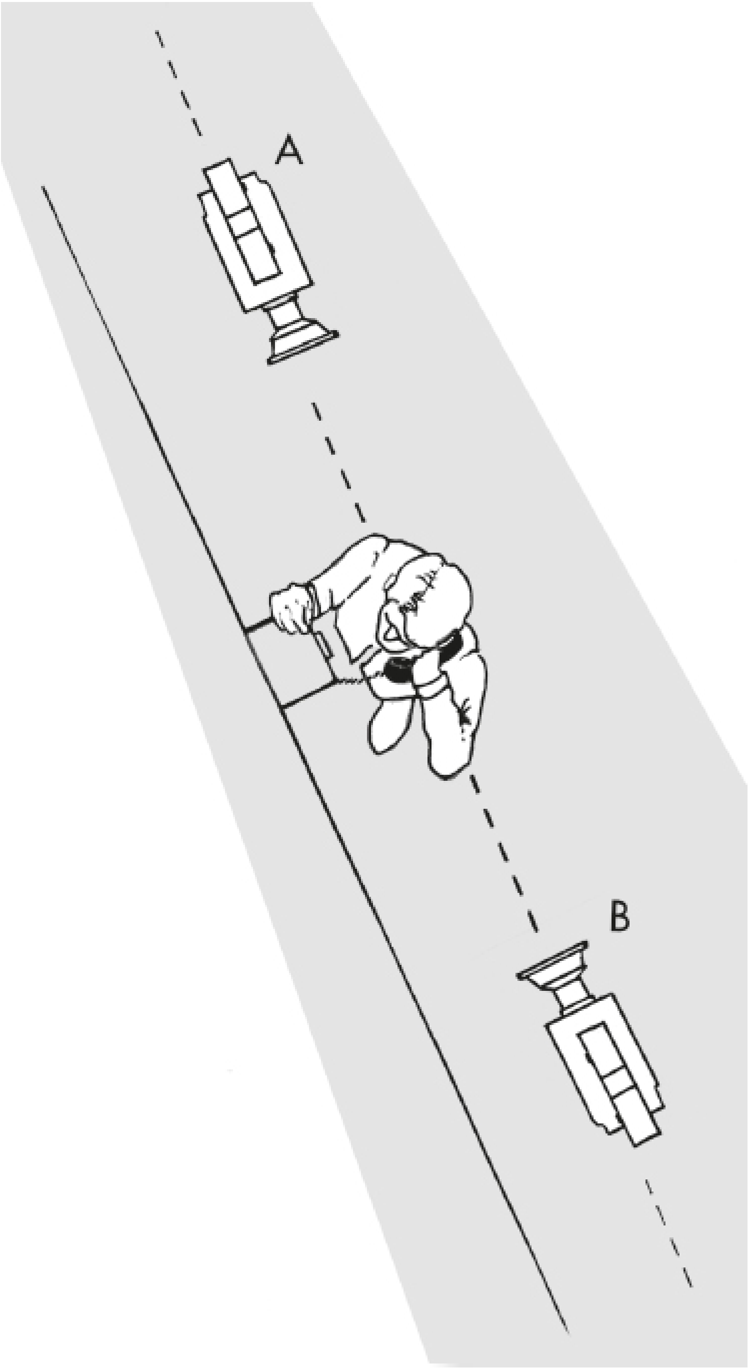


Figure 6.20, Part 1: The line of action. When edited together, shots obtained with cameras A and B reverse screen direction.

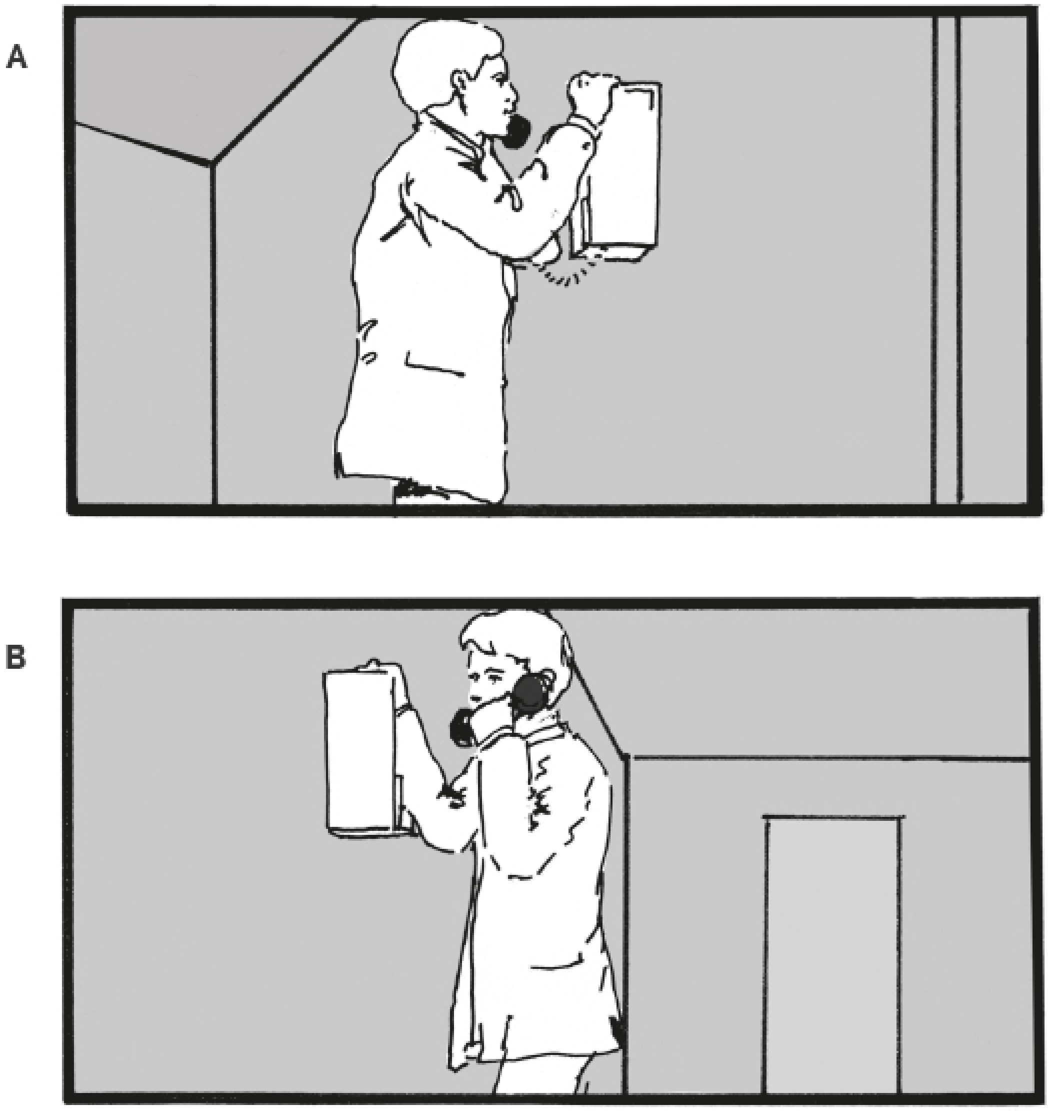


Figure 6.20, Part 2: The line of action. Any of the camera positions shown above can be edited together without disorienting the viewer.

7 Editing: Temporal Connections

In 1920, the Soviet filmmaker and theorist Lev Kuleshov performed a now famous experiment demonstrating that the meaning of shots in sequence can be created entirely through editing. Kuleshov used a close-up shot of the Russian actor Moszhukhin's expressionless face as a reaction shot in three different sequences. The actor is seen "reacting" to a bowl of soup, a woman in a coffin, and a child playing with a toy bear. Audiences viewing the scenes marveled at Moszhukhin's sensitive performance in each situation, though in every instance it was the same close-up. The logic driving our understanding here is cause and effect.

When we speak of storytelling logic, we are actually referring to the structure of shots, sequences, and scenes. Structure controls the order in which the story information is given to the viewer. It is as important to the storytelling process as the actual information being presented. Since structure in films can be presented in a storyboard in ways that a screenplay cannot convey, the visualization process can be considered part of the writing and, ultimately, the editing process.

The Narrative Impulse

Novelist E.M. Forster's often-quoted definition of plot is a good place to begin understanding the kind of structural logic that motivates editing choices. Forster began by describing a series of events that were not a plot: "The King died and then the Queen died." But, as Forster observed, if we say, "The King died and the Queen died of grief," we have described a plot because there is a causal connection.

In the course of any story, this cause-and-effect relationship is the underlying scheme that involves the reader. It does this by asking the reader to become involved in making the logical connections between events. Forster's example is simplified to make a point, and doesn't show us how an author might reveal the relationship between the King and Queen. For instance, in the early chapters the Queen might be portrayed as indifferent to the King's death. As the story progresses, however, the author might reveal small details that would explain that the Queen, having assumed the throne takes care not to reveal her feelings for fear of being seen as weak by her subjects. Or we might learn in chapter one that the Queen has died and not discover until the last page of the story that the cause of her illness was the King's death. In both cases, the reader is provoked into speculation by the order and manner in which the plot is revealed even though the same basic events are being related in each version of the story.

In fiction, cause-and-effect is frequently set up as a question-and-answer scheme that encourages the reader's participation. The cliffhanger ending in a serialized story, where the answer to the question of what will happen next is withheld to create suspense, is an example of the most exaggerated exploitation of this device.

Stories that use a question-and-answer strategy may be set up in many ways. A question may be answered through the accumulation of detail over several dozen pages or it might be answered succinctly shortly after it has been posed. In fact, the question-and-answer presentation of information usually occurs on every page of a story operating on several levels simultaneously. This is as true for a screenplay or film as it is for a novel or short story. Continuity editing is based on these types of question-and-answer strategies, though we usually speak of them as connections. Listed below are the three most basic types of connections found in continuity editing:

> **Temporal connections:** We cut from a man dropping his drinking glass in one shot to the glass breaking on the floor in the second shot.
>
> **Spatial connections:** We cut from a wide shot of the White House to a recognizable detail of the White House in a closer shot — for example, the capitol dome.
>
> **Logical connections:** We cut from a wide shot of the White House to a shot of the President seated in an office. No temporal or spatial connection is necessary in this combination. If we recognize the White House and we recognize the President, then we make the logical connection that he's seated in an office in the White House, even though

> there is no actual information presented to tell us the President is in the White House. It’s merely implied.

These types of connections create the illusion of a real, physical world from fragmentary images and sounds. The previous examples mainly show how to establish a convincing version of the natural world, but editing connections can also can be used to shape the plot and dramatic content as well.

Narrative Motion

To advance the narrative it is necessary not only to ask questions but to set up expectations. For instance, in the example of the two shots used to show the man dropping his drinking glass, questions and answers are only used to depict action. If, however, we know that one of the drinks at the party contains poison, we will be provoked into asking all sorts of who, what, when, where, and why questions about the poison. Since we bring all sorts of knowledge and experience to any story we read or watch, we will speculate about possible answers to all the questions raised. Nearly all editing strategies in narrative film are devised to set up a framework of expectations in a series of shots. The result is narrative motion.

This way of arranging shots is fundamental in film editing. Even dialectical montage, which Soviet filmmaker Sergei Eisenstein felt was an alternative to cause-and-effect editing, exploited narrative motion by setting up expectations and asking questions. In Eisenstein’s dialectical shot pattern of thesis-antithesis-synthesis, the first two shots ask the question: “What is the connection between these ideas?” The answer, supplied by Eisenstein in shot three, is synthesis. A new idea from the combination of two previous ideas. In this analysis, Soviet montage and Hollywood continuity cutting are not polar opposites but variations of the same principle of question-and-answer strategies.

Q & A Patterns

The simplest question-and-answer editing pattern requires only two shots — for example, a shot of a person looking offscreen followed by a shot of the object the person is observing, typically called the “cut on the look.” Patterns are not limited by length and may require dozens of shots to complete a question-and-answer cycle. Or, the patterns can be varied by changing the order of the shots. Though we do not speak of their storytelling in this way, much of what we appreciate in the films of directors like Buñuel, Hitchcock, Godard, Welles, and Truffaut are the ways in which they develop question-and-answer patterns that engage the viewer.

Context

The meaning of any given Q and A pattern can be further extended or modified by changing the context that frames it. For instance, in the Kuleshov experiment, our understanding of the man's reaction to the soup, coffin, and child is framed by our assumption that the man is sincerely moved in each scene. If a new scene is added establishing that he is faking his responses, then we will interpret the original sequences differently. While this may seem like rudimentary plotting, the manipulation of these types of narrative elements was crucial to the way Alfred Hitchcock created suspense or Buster Keaton constructed a gag.

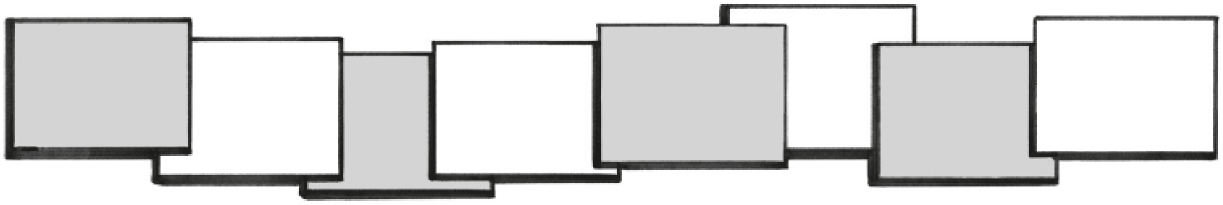


Figure 7.1: Question-and-answer relationship between shots links them into an overlapping chain.

Using the Patterns

For me, the main concern for the visualizer is not the pictorial elements of a shot or sequence, but the structure of the sequence — or, to put it another way, what the viewer knows and when. As it turns out, interesting compositional ideas are usually the result of narrative invention rather than daring pictorial experimentation.

The first series of examples illustrates how the narrative context and question-and-answer pattern determine how we read a scene.

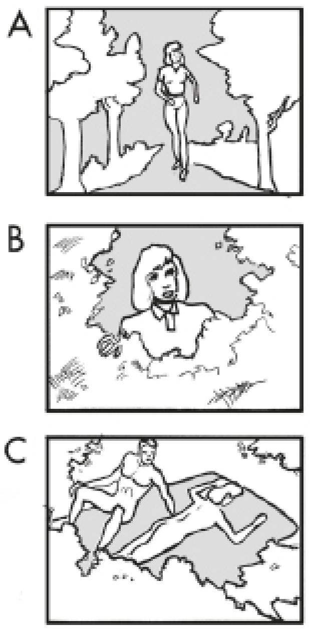
Example One

Narrative context: Our scene takes place in the woods on a summer day. Laura, a teenager, is looking for her older brother Tom. At this point in the story, we have not yet seen Tom and so we do now know what he looks like.

Shot A: Laura enters the woods.
Question: “Where is Tom?”

Shot B: Laura stops short a few yards from a clearing.
New Question: “What has she found?”

Shot C: Tom and a girl lying naked on a blanket in a clearing.
Answer: “Laura has found her brother.”



This is a straightforward question-and-answer editing pattern, and the viewer can easily anticipate the outcome. If, in the next example, we change the context slightly so that we know what Tom looks like, then shot C becomes an answer to shot A and simultaneously raises a new question.

Example Two

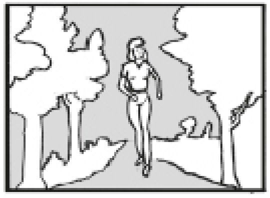
Shot A: Laura enters the woods.
Question: “Where is Tom?”

Shot C: Tom and a girl lying naked on a blanket in a clearing.

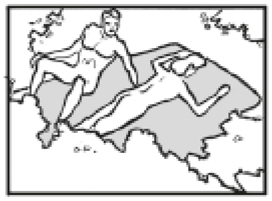
Answer: “Tom is here.”
New Question: “Will Laura find Tom?”

Shot B: Laura stops short a few yards from the clearing.
Answer: “Laura has found Tom.”

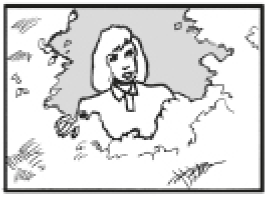
A



C



B



Now, if we were to prolong the time before Laura’s arrival in shot B, the viewer would share a secret with the filmmaker by knowing that Tom is nearby in a compromising situation. This editing pattern places an answer before the question, thereby creating suspense. We can do this by changing the order of the shots and adjusting the context.

Example Three

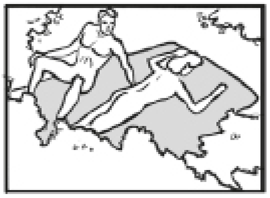
Let’s change thee narrative context again. This time we know that Tom’s sister is looking for him. However, we have not seen her in the story at this point and do not know what she looks like. The context, set in a previous scene, leaves Tom’s whereabouts unknown. As the scene opens, we receive our first answer.

Shot C: Tom and a girl lying naked on a blanket in a clearing.
Answer: “Tom is here.”

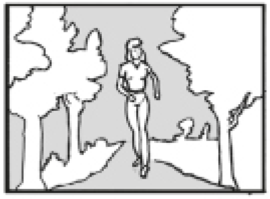
Shot A: A girl enters the woods.
Question: “Is this Laura?”

Shot B: Laura stops short a few yards from the clearing.
Answer: “This is Laura.”

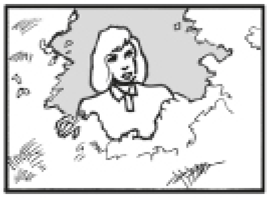
C



A



B



By revealing Tom in a compromising situation in the opening shot, a suspenseful situation is established for the remainder of the scene. When Laura enters the woods in the second shot, the fuse is lit, and we know that a potentially embarrassing meeting is possible. Hitchcock frequently sets up a scene this way by placing the audience in a privileged (and uncomfortable) position by providing them with information that the protagonist desperately needs but cannot obtain. A further embellishment of the same idea might undermine our expectations by letting Laura find other couples making love in the woods before discovering Tom. These earlier encounters would be designed to momentarily encourage us to believe that Laura has found Tom before revealing to us that the couples are strangers to Laura. This would make us unsure of our ability to second-guess the narrative and more susceptible to the surprise of the actual meeting. In screenwriting, this is called misdirection. It’s a strategy that deliberately misleads the audience in the interest of suspense.

In addition to the narrative context created by the filmmaker, the audience brings certain assumptions to their understanding of any scene that the filmmaker uses. These assumptions might include popularly held notions of morality or familiarity with storytelling conventions. The filmmaker can play with these assumptions by reinforcing or subverting them.

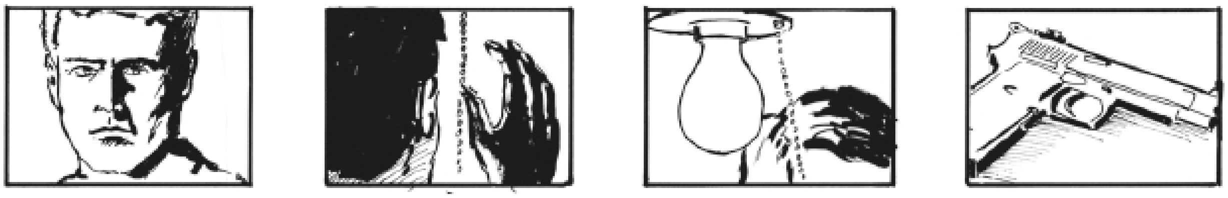
Hitchcock did this rather perversely in *Psycho* by killing off the person that for the first third of the film the audience believes is the protagonist. This was completely unexpected, breaking all the rules of conventional narrative. The result is that the audience feels completely abandoned, as indeed they were, by any kind of moral reason in the fictional world they are watching. The point of these examples is this: Editing patterns and narrative context are used to keep the viewer engaged in a perpetual state of guessing at both conscious and unconscious levels.

More Q and A Variations

In addition to altering the order of question-and-answer patterns, the rhythm and timing of the patterns can be varied by withholding some or all of expected narrative information for a few shots or for several scenes. It is also possible to have more than one question or answer raised within a single shot or combined within a shot. Using a mini-noir scenario, we can look at a few examples:

- A question can be raised in one shot and answered several shots later rather than in the following shot.

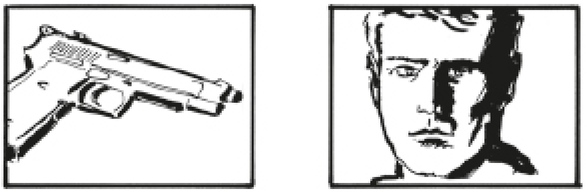
Sequence A



In this case, the look in the first shot would ordinarily be answered by a shot of the gun. However, the answer has been postponed while shots 2 and 3 show the man turning on the light.

- An answer can be given in a shot and the question raised later.

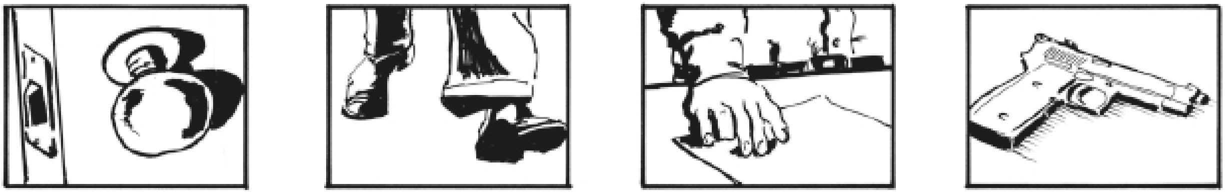
Sequence B



In this version, the cut on the look has been reversed so that we see the object of attention before the look.

- A question can be raised and elaborated on in a series of shots before being answered in a single shot or in a series of shots.

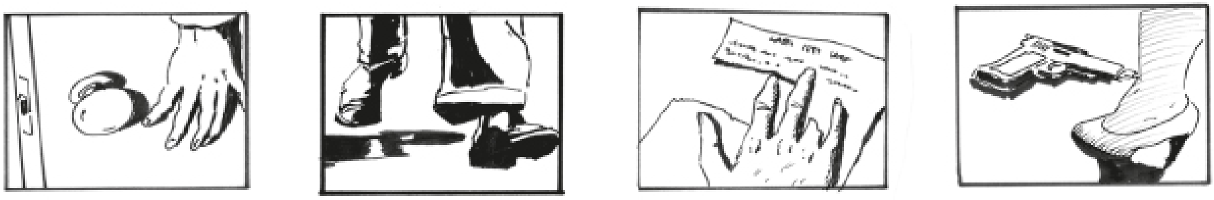
Sequence C



The questions in these shots, of course, are *Who is the person coming through the door, and why?*The partial answer is that it is a man, and in frame 3, we see that he has one finger missing. In frame 4, we learn that he is there to find the gun.

- There can be more than one question raised in a shot or shots. Consequently, more than one answer can be given in a shot or shots.

Sequence D



In frame 1 two questions are raised: Who is coming through the door, and whose hand emerges from behind the door? When the person enters the room in frame 2, we receive a partial answer, learning that the person is a man. But frame 2 also raises the question of the significance of the pool of black ink on the floor. In frame 3, the man puts his hand on the sheet of paper on the table. This answers the question of the man's identity since we now know it is the man with the missing finger, but a new question is raised: Why has part of the letter been carefully removed? Finally, in frame 3, we learn that the gun is on the floor. However, a new question is raised: Who is the woman standing over the gun?

Compared with the previous examples, this last series includes far more information in the same number of shots. This is an exaggeration of Q and A patterns, but the subtle use of these same strategies was exploited by Bergman, Kurosawa, Dreyer, and many other filmmakers to shape psychological fiction and implicate the viewer in the moral dilemmas they presented.

If we try to imagine a graphic representation of the question-and-answer relationships we have been looking at, the shots do not appear connected end-to-end as the editor arranges them into a sequence, but rather they resemble a series of overlapping panels — like a deck of cards that has been fanned out. Figure 7.1 on page 155 shows the narrative relationship between shots in a series. Each is connected to the next by some cause-and-effect relationship. Some shots are more prominent narratively than others, while others remain in the background without answering questions or raising new ones, simply supporting existing information with more detail.

The Limits of Clarity

Because question-and-answer storytelling techniques frequently relate information in a roundabout way, this indirectness may appear confusing to the uninitiated when described in a screenplay, shot list, or storyboard. Screenwriters, directors, and editors may be encouraged to avoid unusual Q and A patterns because it is mistakenly believed that the results will be clearer to an audience. An example of this is the classic establishing shot at the opening of a scene. For instance, a scene ends as we learn that an actress is on her way to the theater to replace the ailing lead. In the opening shot of the following scene, we see the theater. This familiar pattern merely shows us what we already expect (the actress is going to the theater) and does little to raise expectations or contribute to narrative motion. If, however, the introduction of the theater is composed of separate shots that raise questions, then the viewer is engaged in connecting these pieces to form a meaningful idea. Consider this sequence of shots as a way of introducing the theater location:

A CU of a few crumpled theater programs on the ground.
+ A CU of stage flats in a garbage dumpster in an alleyway outside the theater.
+ A CU of an empty marquee with most of the letters taken down.
= A closed show.

This is a storytelling alternative to an establishing shot showing the front of a theater with a banner across the lobby doors with the word “closed” printed across it in big letters. Both versions are familiar strategies to show someone arriving at the theater, and the lesson is not the specific solution, but rather the overall notion that storytelling should engage the viewer at every point.

As narrative editing patterns become more complex and syncopated, it is increasingly difficult to execute them without considerable planning. As we have seen, challenging patterns often mean that questions and answers overlap from shot to shot. This precise interrelationship between shots tends to limit the cutting options to a carefully designed plan. On the other hand, the cutting options that are eliminated are nearly always stock solutions. In a sense, business-as-usual editing strategies are easily interchangeable precisely because they lack the connective relationships of complex question-and-answer strategies. This brings us to the subject of coverage of action.

Camera Cutting vs. Coverage

Theoretically, a fully developed storyboard can show a director all the shots he needs for a scene. If the director and cinematographer shoot the boards exactly as they appear on paper, even the lengths of shots can be estimated. Later, the editor only has to trim shots here and there to make them all fit smoothly together. This method of shooting is called cutting in the camera and presupposes a perfect script, perfect storyboard, and the perfect execution of each shot. Optimism may be a virtue, but to disregard the things that can go wrong in filmmaking — and they are many — is foolhardy. Cutting in the camera is like working on a high wire without a net. Risky, yes, but Spielberg, Hitchcock, and John Ford all did this to eliminate editing options that the studio heads might use to alter their work.

The alternative view supposes that perfection is unobtainable and, therefore, not worth pursuing in the first place. Directors who believe this, and who are unsure of how to visualize, shoot sequences by resorting to a programmed formula of camera setups. This system, usually based on the triangle system of camera placement, is called coverage. It employs several camera options for every action, ensuring that a logical sequence can be cut together in the editing process with the maximum number of options. A formulaic selection of wide, medium, and close-up shots is usually sufficient for a basic rendition of any scene and places a great deal of emphasis on the editor's contribution. While coverage is an extremely safe way to shoot, it is also uninspired, because visual strategies designed for the specific needs of a scene are discouraged unless all the coverage shots have been obtained first. Unfortunately, there is often only enough time within the shooting schedule for coverage, with the result that many interesting visual approaches are never attempted.

Each method, camera cutting and coverage, has advantages and disadvantages and is rarely used exclusively in feature filmmaking. For this reason, "getting coverage" can refer not only to a system of camera placement but also to shooting extra backup shots (in addition to those storyboarded) if time permits or if the director has gambled on an unusual approach to a scene. Once a set is lit and blocked and the essential shots needed to convey the story have been photographed, the attitude of director and cinematographer is generally: "We're here, so we might as well get some backup shots just in case." Any filmmaker will know how practical this is, since moving the camera to pick up extra angles is fairly rapid in comparison with the time it takes to light a set and block a scene. Once the technical and dramatic needs of a scene are set, directors are often tempted to get as many shots as possible before tearing down lights and moving on to the next scene. It's the same even when using a storyboard, and just how many extra shots are filmed depends on the confidence and experience of the director. And finally, there is the enthusiasm factor. Many directors just like to take pictures. Even after all the necessary shots are in the can, if the weather is right or the lighting and set are great, it can be very hard to call it a wrap.

One of the more useful aspects of coverage is that action is played out in full for most setups even if the director expects to only use a small portion of a particular take. This is most useful when filming dialogue. For instance, a scene consisting of a father speaking to his children is storyboarded so that the father does all the talking. In the storyboards, the father is pictured in a three-shot that dollies past the kids and ends up in a close-up on Dad. The entire scene is played in one long take. Though everyone on the creative team might agree that this is the way the scene should be photographed, it would be unwise to rely on this one shot and not get reaction shots of the children at the same time. The director would then be covered in case there is a problem with the tracking shot.

Now let's suppose that instead of using the long dolly shot indicated in the storyboard, the director elects to use camera coverage instead. He would probably shoot a medium shot and close-up of the father and the same setups of the kids. That would be six shots. He would probably also shoot a three-shot OTS of the kids and a reverse OTS of Dad. That would be a total of eight setups. The amount of time it would take to light and photograph all these shots could easily mean that the dolly shot would have to be sacrificed. That is the practical choice between coverage and camera cutting.

It should be clear from this example that the balance between the two methods depends on the situation. Some scenes are obviously easier to film than others for dramatic or technical reasons. Sometimes it's possible to get considerable coverage *and* complex dolly moves or other time-consuming setups. Be assured, however, that many of the shots will not be used in the edited version. Part of learning your craft as a visualizer is having a good sense of what will work before the camera rolls. All directors leave a margin for error and cover themselves, but knowing what works in advance translates into a high *average* of usable shots. The payoff is not the money saved by shooting fewer setups, but the extra time that can be used to take greater artistic chances with more ambitious staging, shots, and performances.

Composing Action for Editing

So far, this chapter has focused on editing for the director, stressing storytelling and narrative motion. A full discussion of editing techniques for the film editor as well as editing room procedures can be found in several excellent books listed in the recommended reading section in the back of this book. However, a brief overview of these techniques is of value to any filmmaker visualizing a sequence.

Cutting On Movement

Like the line of action, cutting on movement or action is one of the two main strategies of the continuity style to create the illusion of a continuous real world on the screen.

As mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, edit points are “placed” in the shot or at least anticipated by the director in the staging of action. There are three ways in which an edit can be made to preserve the continuity of action when two or more views of a subject are being combined. Suppose we have a shot of a boy running across the front lawn of his home and jumping over a hedge onto the sidewalk, as shown in Figure 7.2. The first shot runs the entire length of the action. Now we decide to cut to a new angle somewhere into the first shot. Here are the three options: 1) We can cut to the new shot at the point where the boy reaches the hedge and begins to jump. 2) We can cut to the new shot while the boy is in midjump. 3) We can cut to the new shot after he lands on the ground.

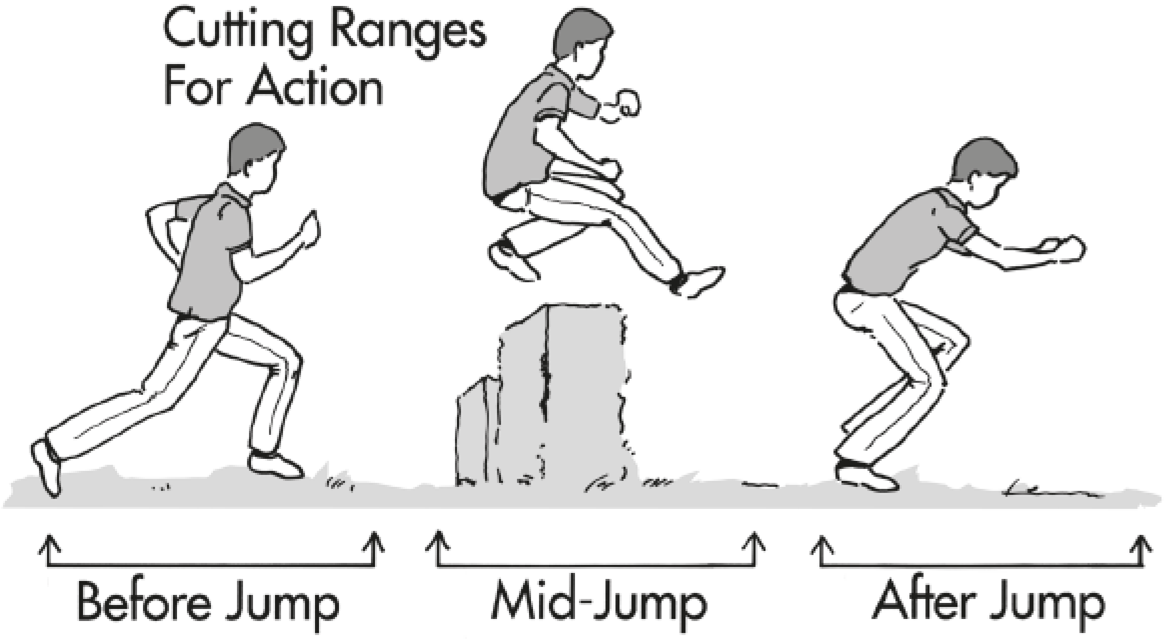

Cutting Ranges For Action
Before Jump
Mid-Jump
After Jump

Figure 7.2: Cutting ranges for actions.

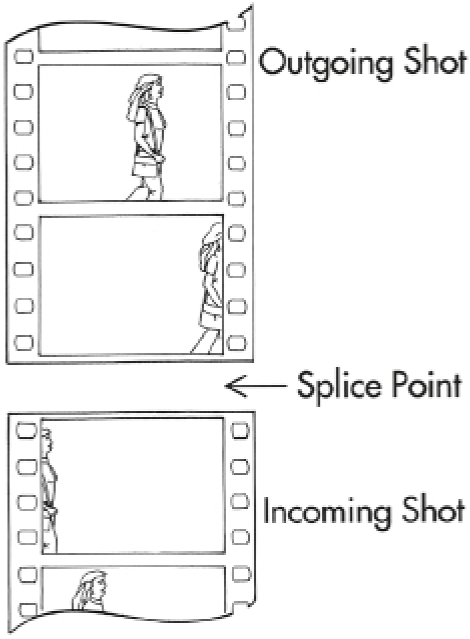

Outgoing Shot
Splice Point
Incoming Shot

Figure 7.3

These are all acceptable edit points, but the common practice in the continuity style would locate the cut somewhere into the action rather than before or after the boy has left the ground. This tends to hide the cut and make the transition to a new shot invisible. The exact point of the cut is dependent on the subject and the editor's sense of movement.

Cutting on the action is found in virtually all types of sequences whether the subject of the shot is lifting a drink to his or her lips or merely turning his head or moving his eyes. Filmmakers mindful of this essential editing strategy will stage action so that it will overlap an anticipated edit point between camera angles.

Exits and Entrances

When the subject of a shot moves into or out of a frame it is common practice to make the cut while the subject is still partially within the frame. Figure 7.3 shows the position of a subject in an outgoing and an incoming shot. The effect onscreen is to make the cut smoother and to speed up the flow of action.

Clearing the Frame

This is an alternative strategy to cutting on movement when joining different angles of the same subject. Instead of cutting while the subject is within the frame, the subject is allowed to exit the frame before the cut to a new shot is made. It is customary in this strategy to hold on the empty frame of the outgoing shot for a moment. Figure 7.4 shows an example of this strategy. In the outgoing shot birds fly into the frame, which gives us action to view while holding the clear frame for a minimum of 1–2 seconds at the end of the shot (in our diagram the last frame is symbolic of what would be 24 or more actually film frames).

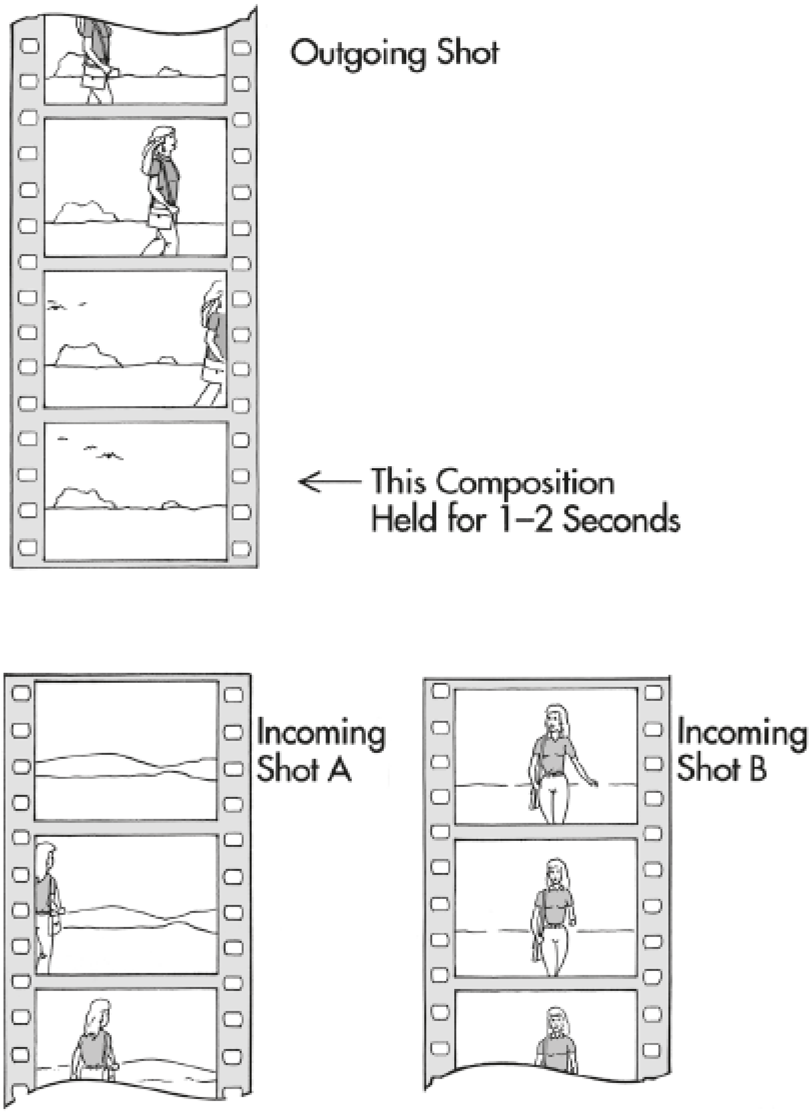

Outgoing Shot
This Composition Held for 1–2 Seconds
Incoming Shot A
Incoming Shot B

Figure 7.4

There are several options for cutting to the incoming shot after clearing the frame, depending on how long the clear frame is held in the outgoing shot. One option is for the incoming shot (A) to open without the subject in the frame. This opening can vary in length depending on the action in the shot before the main action arrives. If we open on a busy park or a trickling stream in the woods, the opening serves the purpose of an establishing shot and could be held for several seconds. A second option is for the incoming shot (B) to open with the subject already in the frame. This is not a common practice in the continuity style since it is somewhat abrupt. A third alternative would be to cut on the subject partially in frame, as shown in the previous figure (7.3).

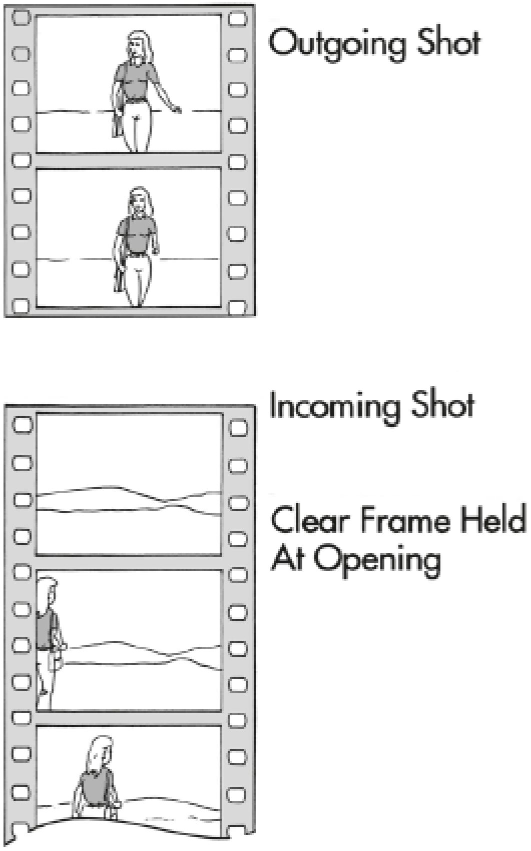


Figure 7.5

Clearing the frame can be looked at in two ways. First, it is a method for joining shots of the same subject in different backgrounds. In this case, it serves a function similar to that of the dissolve and indicates a passage of time. The second use for clearing the frame is as a substitute for the cut on action so that an ingoing shot and outgoing shot represent continuous time. In general, clearing the frame is an easy out for directors who are timid about preserving continuity, since it is almost impossible to make a continuity mistake with this technique. In fact, it is such a flexible cut that it can be used to join shots on opposite sides of the line of action.

One last strategy is shown in Figure 7.5. In this version, the outgoing shot ends with the subject clearly within the frame. The incoming shot begins before the subject appears and holds on a clear frame for at least a second before the subject enters (again the clear frame in the diagram is symbolic of many more clear frames).

Editing and Visualization

One of the values of knowing conventional editing practices is that it gives the filmmaker a point of departure when he is visualizing. Staging, in particular, is made easier by an awareness of the types of movement that provide opportunities for cutting. In any given scene, the filmmaker will visualize how long certain actions should be viewed before moving to another shot. Typically, action is shot so that the beginning and end of a single shot of the action continues past the cutting point. Everything is shot so that the action overlaps. This gives the editor the ability to find the best edit point in the action. Another strategy is to create clear actions for an actor such as slamming his fist on a table, sitting down or getting up, scratching his nose, or drinking from a glass to create strong cutting points.

This may sound far more mechanical than it really is. If these rules sound overly restrictive, it should be remembered that they can be broken at any time in favor of a better idea. The value of understanding editing practices is that it enables the director to visualize an overview of required camera setups for an entire sequence, allowing him to turn his attention to the dramatic needs of the scene.

Part III

The Workshop

8 The Basics Applied

Shot Flow

Shot flow is the name given to the kinetic effect of a sequence of shots. This is an apt description since it evokes the image of a river, which can be turbulent, tranquil, or winding, and can even turn back against itself in midcourse. A sequence of shots is often comprised of complex rhythmic and dynamic continuity relationships that, like a river, merge into a single, unified structure. But no matter how intricate the relationships between the shots, there are two sequential ingredients that are fundamental to our understanding of visualization: shot size and camera angle. There are also many other compositional elements familiar to artists from photography and painting that contribute to a sequence, but camera angle and shot size are the dominant physical changes that determine shot flow. In this chapter, we will concentrate on shot size.

The basic relationship between wide, medium, and close-up shots and angle of view becomes clear if we construct a sequence that establishes a subject within a location. By keeping our example simple, we will be able to concentrate on the graphic design of the frame. The purpose of this first exercise is to increase our awareness of the range of kinetic qualities that can be produced with a few simple shots.

Before getting started, let’s establish standard shot descriptions and their abbreviations. These will be used throughout the book from this point on.

ECU: Extreme close-up
MCU: Medium close-up
CU: Close-up
MS: Medium shot
WS: Wide shot
LS: Long shot
ELS: Extreme long shot
BG (bg): Background
FG (fg): Foreground

OTS: Over the shoulder
POV: Point of view

Establishing a Location by Varying Shot Size

As basic as the change in shot size is to the continuity style, it is rarely studied in depth by filmmakers. Testing your ability to judge the effect of graphic variation in a sequence will help you to sharpen your perception of mood, point of view, rhythm, tempo, emotional distance, and dramatic intent in narrative situations.

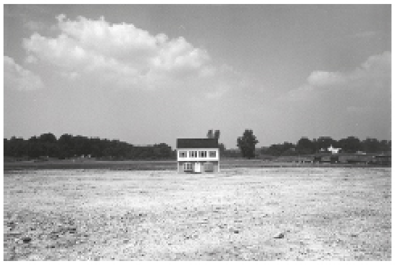
In the following series of photoboards, we will establish the location of a house to examine the consequences of shot size. There are three basic continuity strategies that are possible to describe the location: The camera can move towards the house beginning in wide shot; the camera can move out from a close-up of some detail of the house to reveal the full location; or the camera can create a sense of the whole by using a series of close-ups.

VERSION ONE

In the first pair of sequences, frames 1–3 and 4–6, we can compare the graphic relationship between shots when we vary the scale. Each sequence creates movement, and you should be aware of the variation in velocity and acceleration in each version. Frames 1–3, for instance, show limited change between frames 1 and 2 until the house jumps forward in frame 3. The second sequence is more dynamic, largely because frame 6 fills the frame. We can also judge the effect of “pulling back” from a subject by reading the photoboards in reverse order from right to left.

Putting analysis aside for a moment, look at each sequence as a complete statement. Developing an intuitive sense of the overall perceptual effect of a sequence is one of the skills necessary for visualization. Try to imagine a story line for these sequences with sound and score. Move your eyes over them as you might imagine them being edited. This is essentially the skill you will need to turn the text of a script into a storyboard.

1



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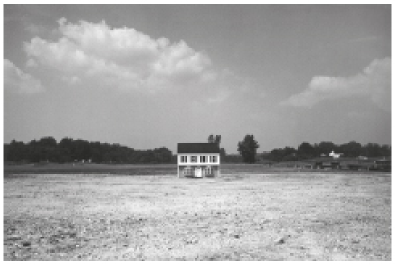

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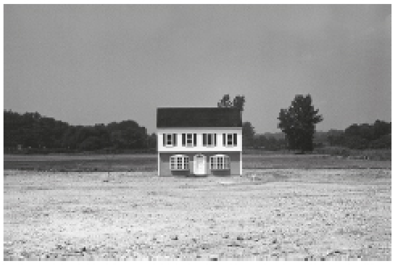

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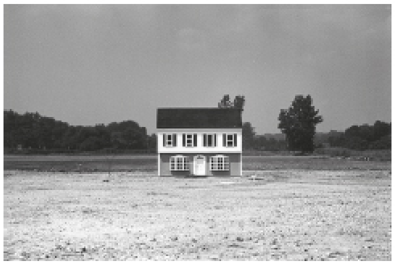

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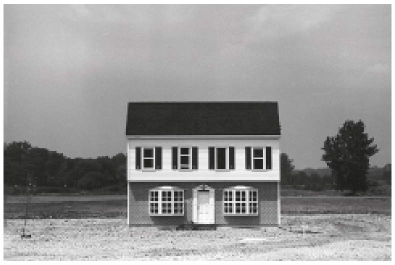

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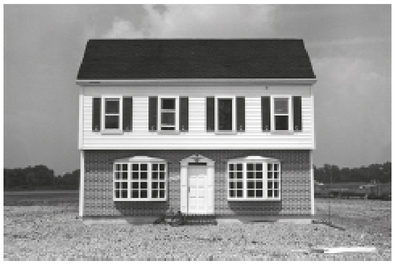
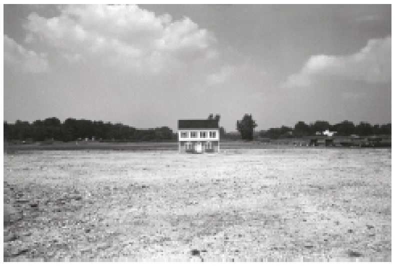


VERSION TWO

Here we see a more fully extended range of shots. In the previous examples, each sequence showed the house moving closer, but no new information was revealed. Now a true CU is added in frames 3 and 6, and we see a For Sale sign. The change in scale is extreme, with the camera moving approximately 1/4 mile between shots. Now cover frames 2 and 5 with one hand and look at the resulting shot pairs 1–3 and 4–6. You can see just how wide a jump can be made through space while retaining spatial unity.

1



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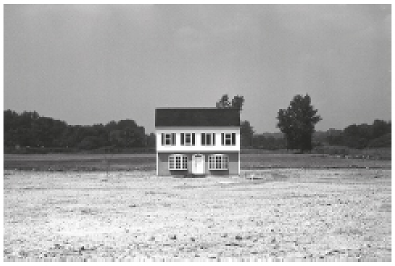

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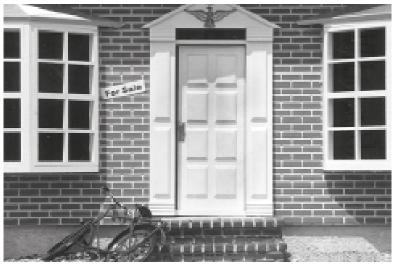

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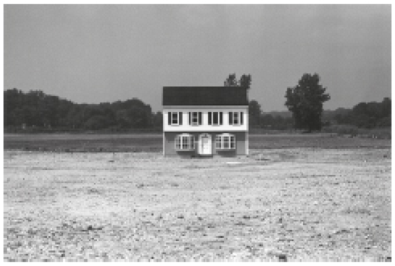

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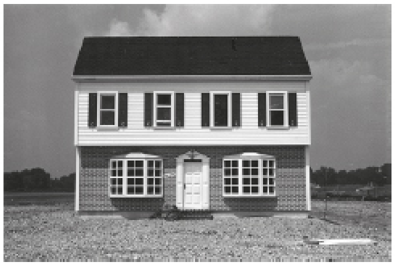

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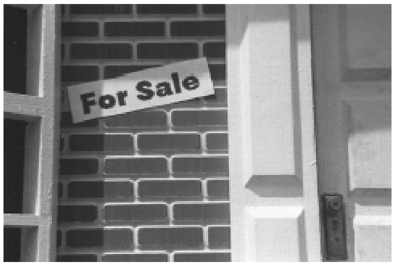
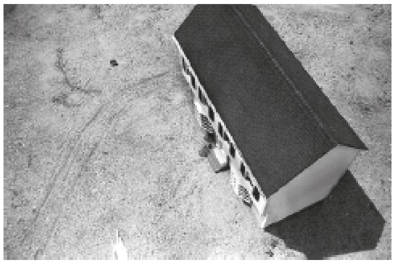


VERSION THREE

This next approach compares four sequences. First is a straightforward treatment of a change in shot size from an extreme high angle (frames 1–3). In frames 4–6 rotational movement is added but without the change in shot size. Next, we combine these approaches, moving closer in a circular path as shown in frames 7–9.

1



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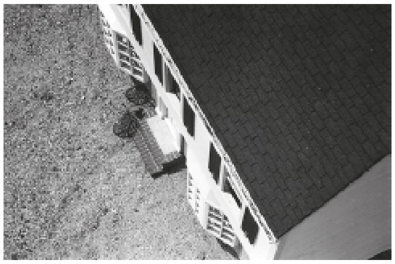

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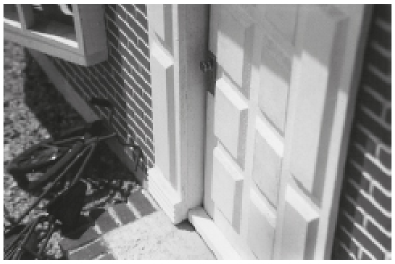

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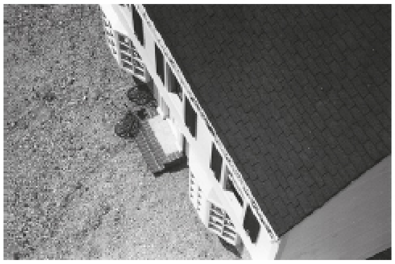

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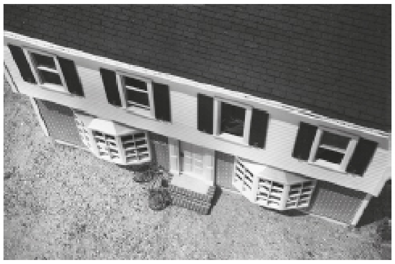

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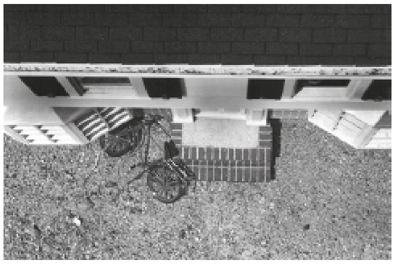

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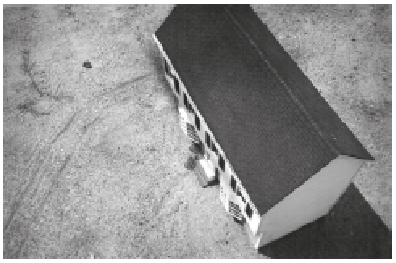

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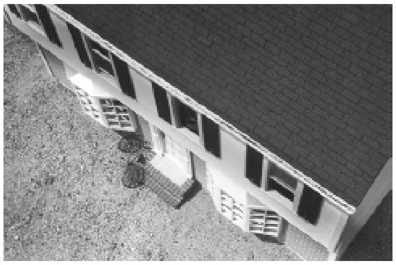

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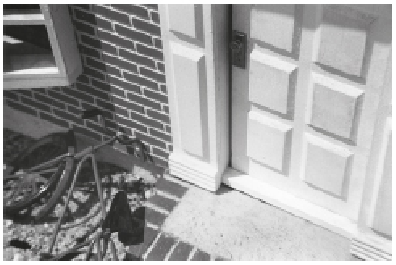
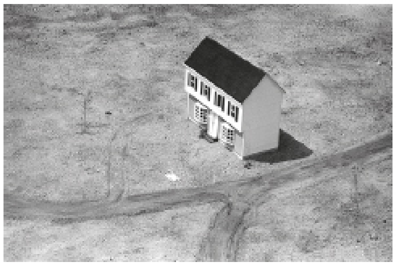


Finally, in frames 10–12, we move in three planes: downward, closer, and in an arc around the house.

10



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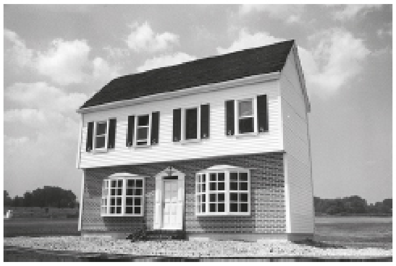

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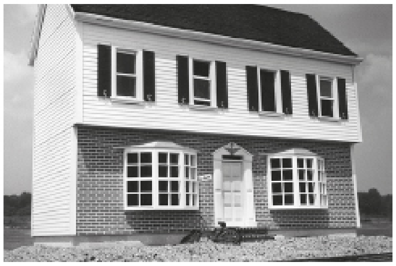
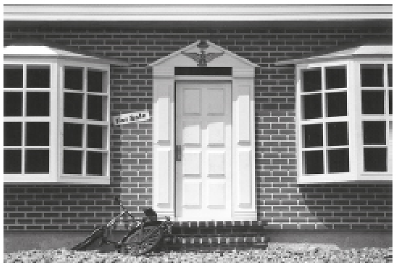


VERSION FOUR

In these next two treatments, we move from a CU to a wide shot, essentially a pullback move. In both cases, the two straight-on angles end with an angular aerial shot, which results in a more dynamic editing pattern. This visual contrast in motion is a valuable graphic effect demonstrating the power of a simple change in angle. In both of the present examples, the first two shots of each sequence set up a line of motion: In the third frame, we expect to continue the straight line of motion back from the front door of the house, but instead there is a jump in scale and angle.

1



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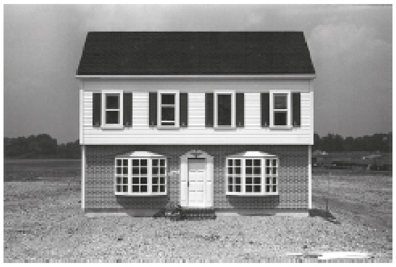

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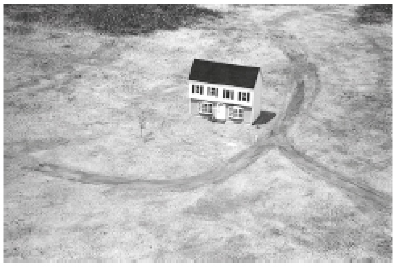

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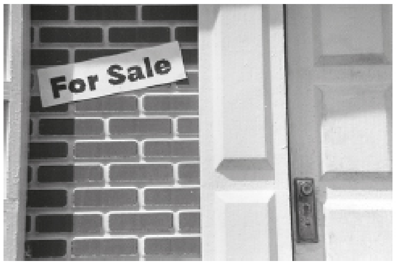

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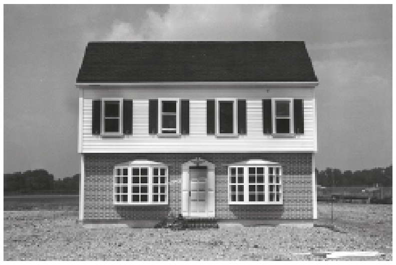

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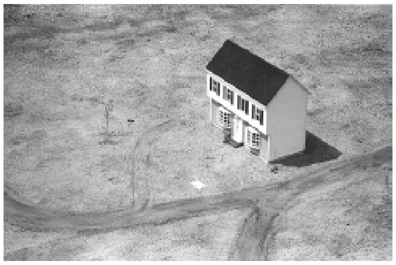
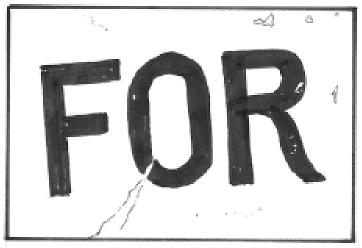


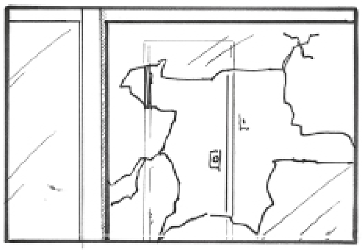
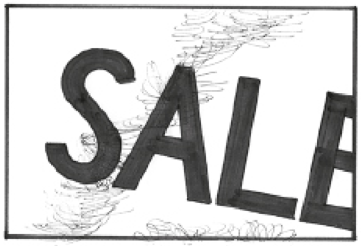
VERSION FIVE

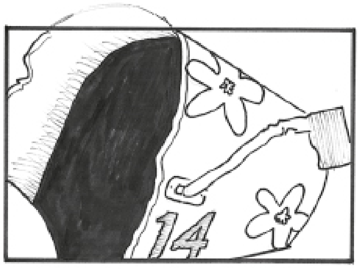
We will handle this next series of shots somewhat differently, composing a location from details from which the viewer will construct the whole. This relies on a more iconographic, abstract use of images. For this reason, we will start with a list of shots — concepts of the house as expressed in individual images. To help focus our energies we'll give ourselves a narrative context. This is our story: A divorce has split a family in two and the house they formally occupied is now up for sale. Following is a list of images that seem to me to express this idea.

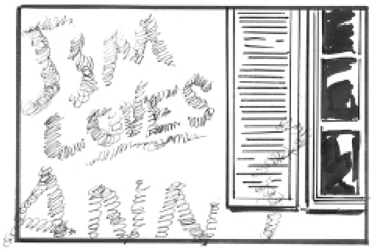
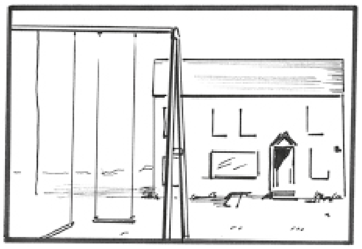
1. Rusted bike abandoned outside
2. Mailbox knocked over on ground
3. Uncollected junk mail piled on the porch
4. Broken window panes
5. Empty rooms viewed through the broken windows
6. For Sale sign
7. Disconnected cable television line
8. Empty doghouse turned over
9. Vandalism (graffiti on the side of house)
10. Moving boxes filled with trash

The following storyboard is based on some of these ideas.





As we have just seen, a basic three- or six-shot sequence can be handled in several ways even when using a static camera to record a simple subject. Part of the visualizing process is comparing "drafts" of the storyboard as we have just done, recombining new and old ideas until the sequence is exactly as you want it. The value of exercises like the ones we have just completed is to help filmmakers develop the ability to imagine a story in whole sequences by improving visual memory and the awareness of the many graphic elements that comprise any shot and sequence. In the next example, we will view the design process through the eyes of a filmmaker. By personalizing the examples this way, we will have a chance not only to see the results of the creative process, but to see the process itself.

NARRATIVE PROBLEM ONE: THE STATIC SHOT

A filmmaker is scouting a location for the opening scene of a film based on his childhood experiences. The scene calls for a suburban neighborhood. He passes a side street in which a line of trees and the way the sunlight falls on the pavement evoke familiar memories. He gets out of his car and walks down the sidewalk to a house that is very much like his family's first house. Standing at the edge of the front lawn, he begins to imagine the opening scene of the film. He feels he does not have to follow the direction of the script in every detail in the first scene, but merely needs to introduce the period, characters, and mood of the story.

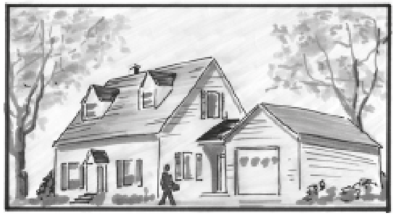
The scene, as the filmmaker originally wrote it, described a weekday morning when, as usual, he was the last member of his family to wake up. Most of the action took place in the kitchen with very little dialogue. But as the filmmaker stands in front of this real house in the bright sunlight, new memories come to him. He remembers his parents' frustration over his forgetfulness, the jackets and sweaters lost at school or textbooks left on the bus. He remembers a certain morning when he was 10 …

VERSION ONE

In this first sequence, the filmmaker decides to restrict himself to static shots using limited panning to follow the action. He begins with a straightforward wide shot of the house in frame 1. After a few moments, the father exits the front door heading to the garage. A new shot in frame 2 shows the window of the boy's bedroom through which we can see a corner of the bed as the father passes by outside. The covers move and a sock falls off the bed. We cut to frame 3 with the boy in the extreme foreground and the father outside.

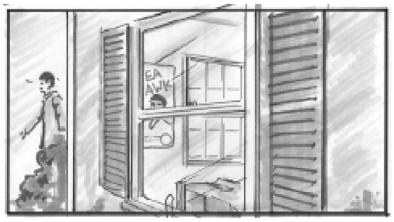
The filmmaker stops here, seeing that the staging is not working. He feels frame 1 should show the house within a wider context — that is, the neighborhood and the past. The filmmaker also feels the second frame of the window is too oblique, even though he likes the offhand framing that shows only a part of the boy's bed and not the boy. He tries a new staging.

1



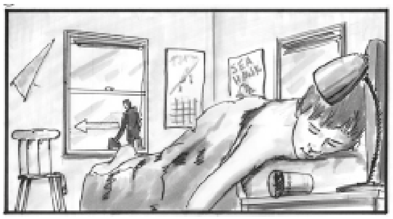
Dad exits front door and walks to garage.

2



Sock falls off bed when boy stirs covers. Dad crosses BG.

3

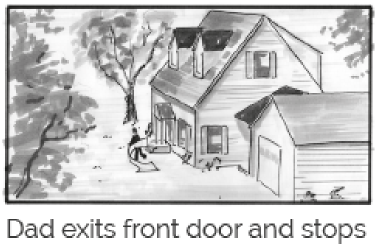


Dad passes by window in BG.

VERSION TWO

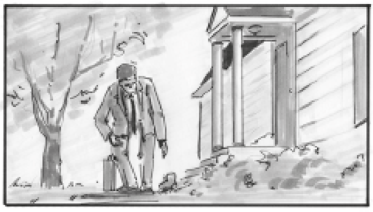
The filmmaker begins the new sequence with a high-angle shot that removes him slightly from the action. He thinks the shot could be less harshly angular, but the inclusion of more surrounding space tends to give a little breathing room as compared with the original opening shot. The father exits in frame 1 and, as he walks to the garage, finds something in the grass. As he bends over to pick it up, we cut to frame 2. What he's found is a sneaker. Shaking his head, he walks a few steps towards camera into a medium shot and sighs. Cut to frame 3. The boy turns over in bed and his bare foot pops out from under the covers. We hear a door open offscreen, and as the boy wriggles into a comfortable position, his father's hand enters the frame and puts the sneaker on the bedpost.

1



Dad exits front door and stops halfway down walk.

2



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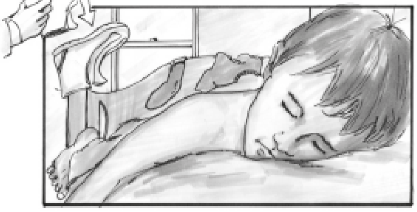
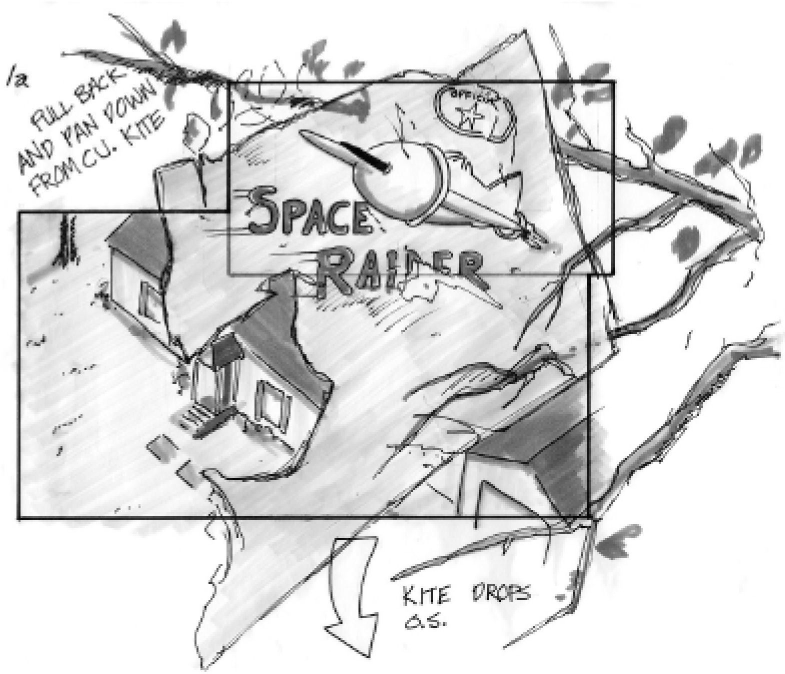


Hold on boy as he squirms under covers. Dad's hand enters frame. He puts sneaker on bed.

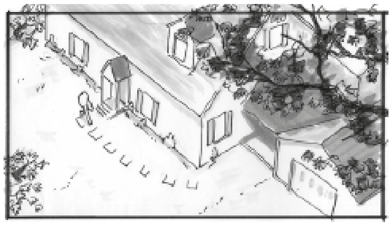
VERSION THREE

In this new version, the film fades up to an opening shot of a bright orange spaceship filling the screen in frame 1a. It flutters and shakes in the morning breeze. The camera pulls back and we realize that we are looking at a torn and rumpled kite impaled on the high branches of a tree brilliantly backlit by the sun. The wind dislodges the kite, which drops out of frame, revealing the house below in frame 1a. The father exits the house and goes to the garage in frame 1b. Cut to the boy in bed in frame 2. The sound of the garage door going up is heard in the background. Cut to the garage door in frame 3. The father goes to the car, and we cut back to the boy in bed in frame 4. The boy turns over and we see first one foot with a sock on it pass the window and then a second bare foot go past. Through the window, we see the father backing the car out of the driveway.

1a

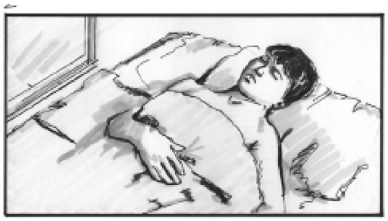


1b *End position of pan/boom*



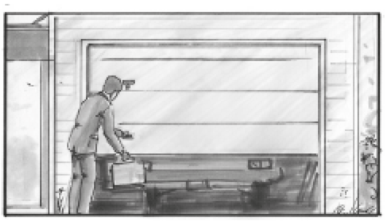
Dad exits front door. Heads for garage.

2



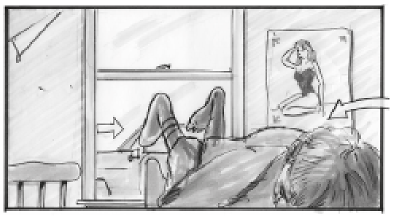
Boy in bed. He stirs slightly when the sound of the garage door opening disturbs his sleep.

3



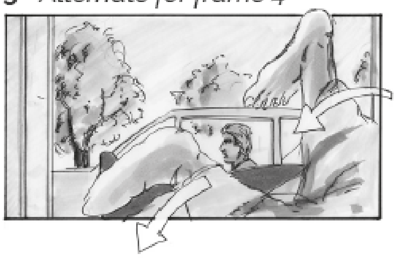
Dad enters the garage and starts the car.

4

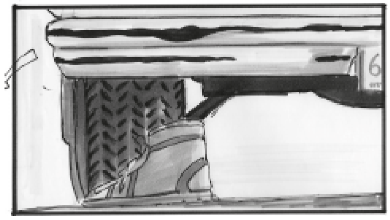


Boy turns over in bed. Foot with sock pops up first, bare foot second. Car passes in BG.

5 *Alternate for frame 4*



6



Car is stopped at sneaker. Dad gets out.

The filmmaker immediately sees an improvement for frame 4 by framing tighter (frame 5). The moment after the car passes by the window the squeal of brakes is heard. Cut to a low-angle shot of the driveway and the car, which has stopped a few feet from the sneaker. The car door opens and the camera reframes slightly to include the father (feet only) getting out of the car in frame 6.

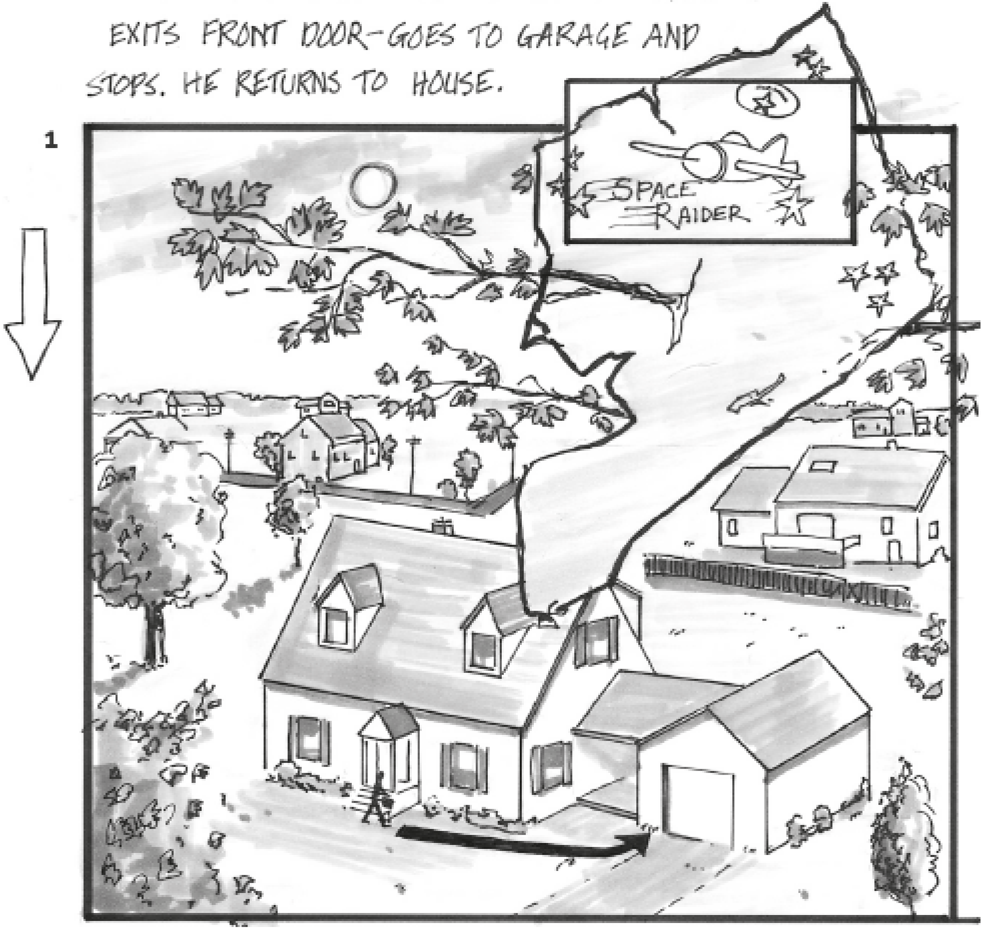
Again, the filmmaker stops at this point to rethink this latest version. He has generated some ideas he likes but can see that they need to be rearranged. First, he decides to keep the kite business, but moved to a lower viewpoint. In this way, he can include some of the neighborhood before panning down to the house. Second, he feels the story focuses too much on the boy and his father. He would prefer to include more of the other members of the family in the hectic morning rush to start the day. This will require intercutting new characters, which will help break up the focus on the sneaker action.

VERSION FOUR

In this final version, the filmmaker has combined the various elements to form a complete sequence.

PULL BACK FROM CU OF KITE. WIND BLOWS KITE DOWN. CAMERA PANS WITH KITE TO HOUSE. FATHER EXITS FRONT DOOR-GOES TO GARAGE AND STOPS. HE RETURNS TO HOUSE.

1



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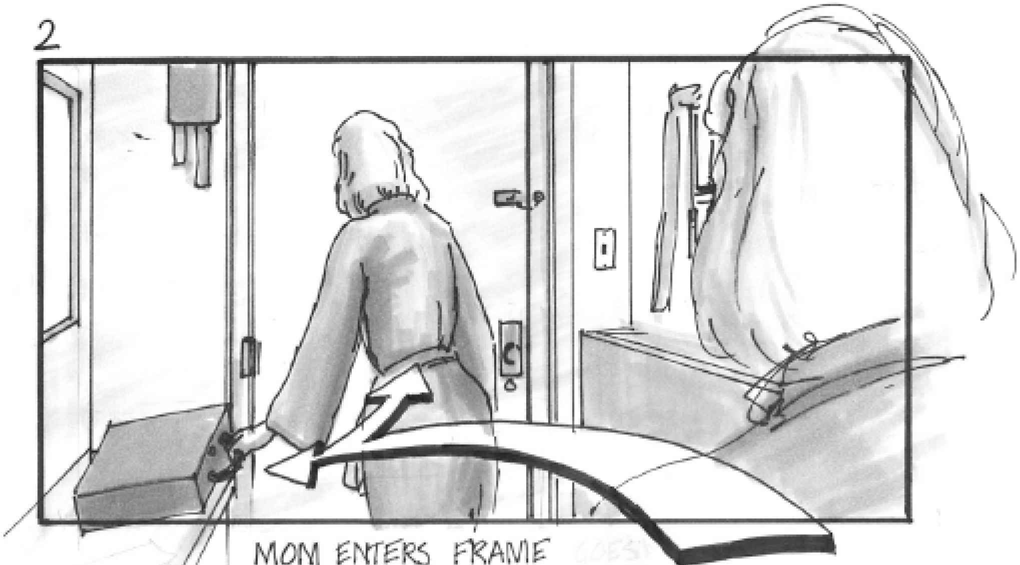
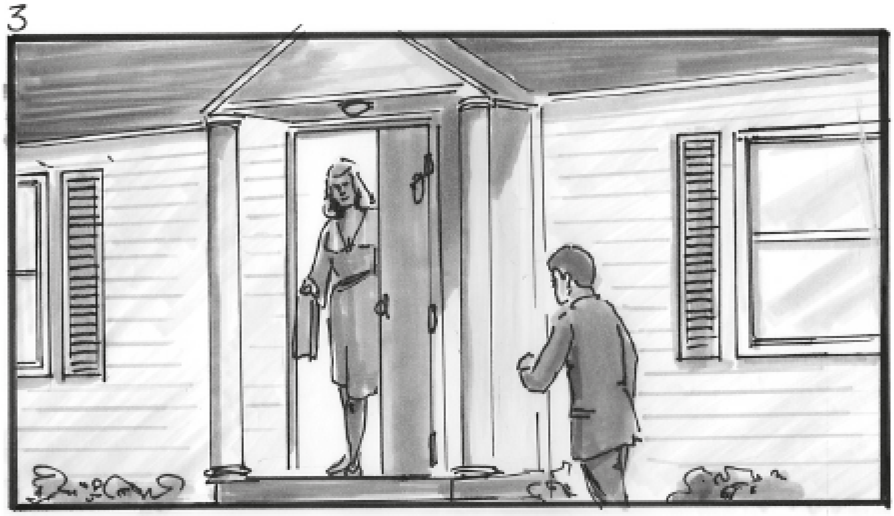


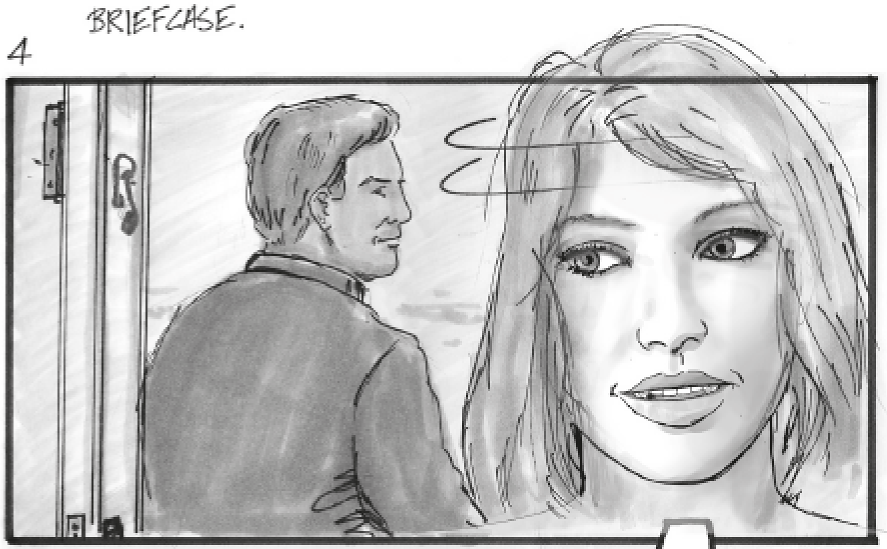
MOM ENTERS FRAME
PICKS UP BRIEFCASE AND OPENS
THE FRONT DOOR.

3



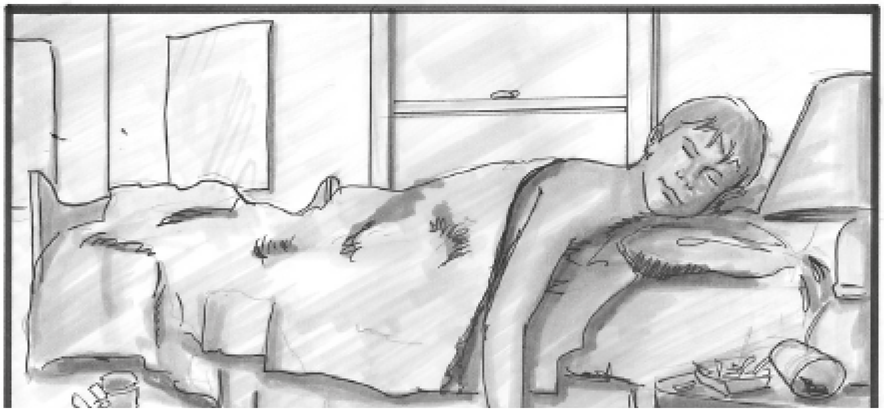
SHE'S WAITING FOR DAD WHEN HE COMES UP STEPS. HE TAKES THE BRIEFCASE.

4



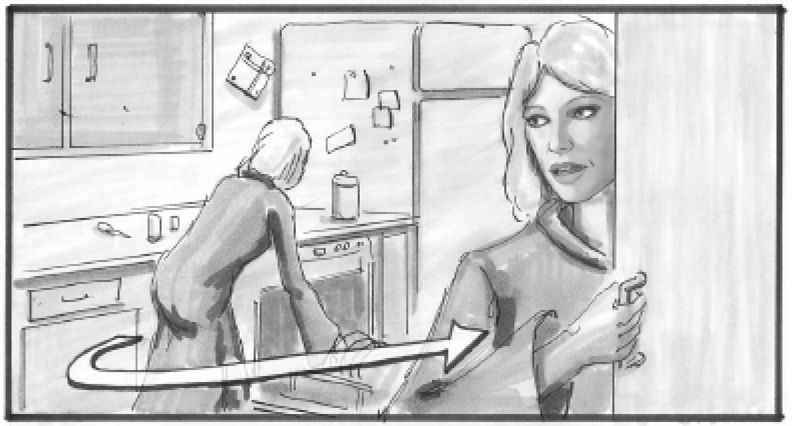
DAD SMILES SHEEPISHLY GOING DOWN STEPS. MOM EXITS TOWARDS

5



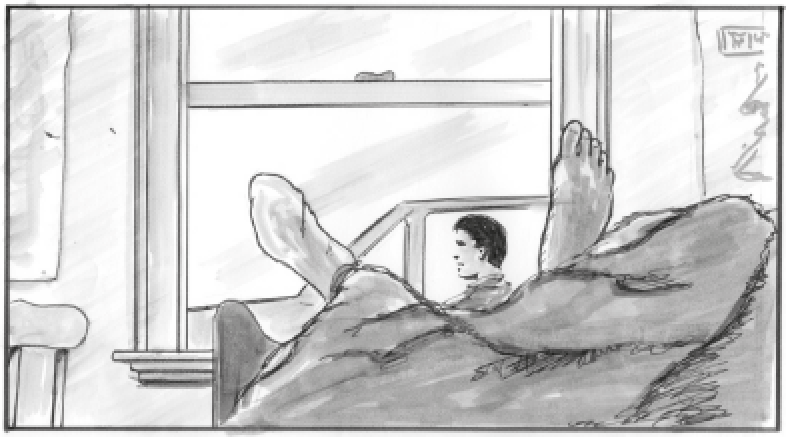
BOY REARRANGES BED COVERS IN HIS SLEEP.

6



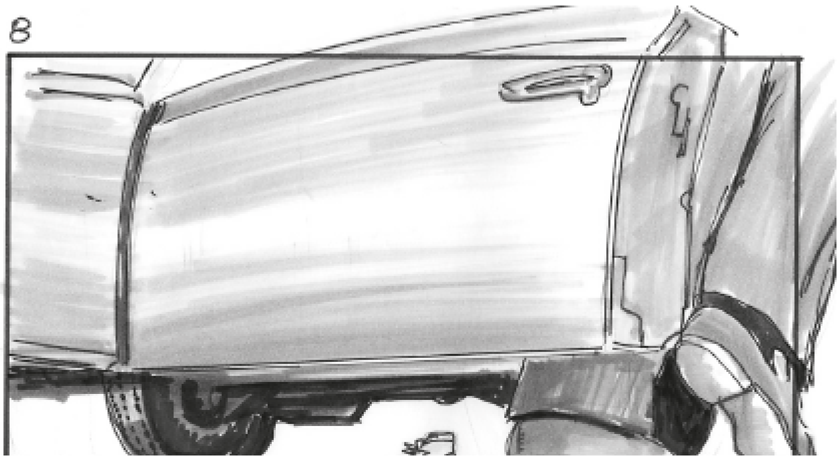
MOM IN KITCHEN-PUTS DISHES AWAY.
CALLS TO DAUGHTER "IS PETER UP?"

7



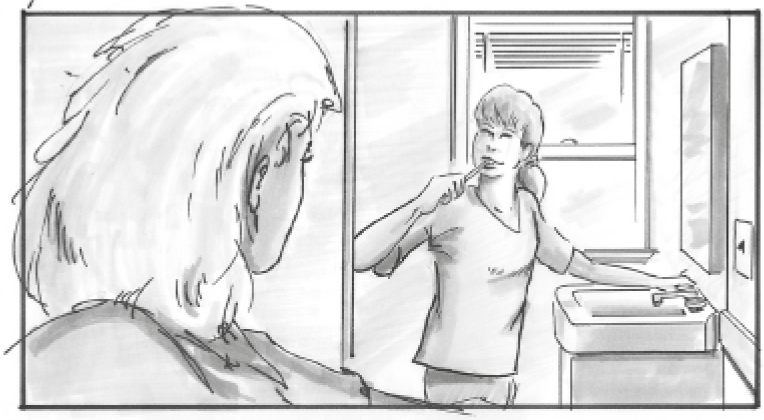
CAMERA ANGLE DOWN BED. LEFT FOOT WITH SOCK
APPEARS FROM UNDER COVERS. BARE FOOT APPEA
NEXT. DAD BACKS CAR DOWN DRIVEWAY IN. BG.-
(SFX) SQUEAL OF BRAKES O.S.

8



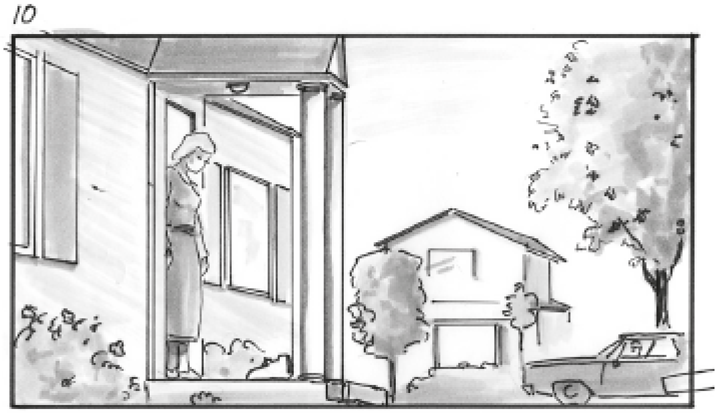
DAD GETS OUT OF CAR. SNEAKER IN BG.
BEHIND CAR.

9



MOM OPENS BATHROOM DOOR "IS PETER UP?"
DAUGHTER SAYS "HOW SHOULD I KNOW?"
(SFX) DOORBELL. MOM EXITS CROSSING FRAME.

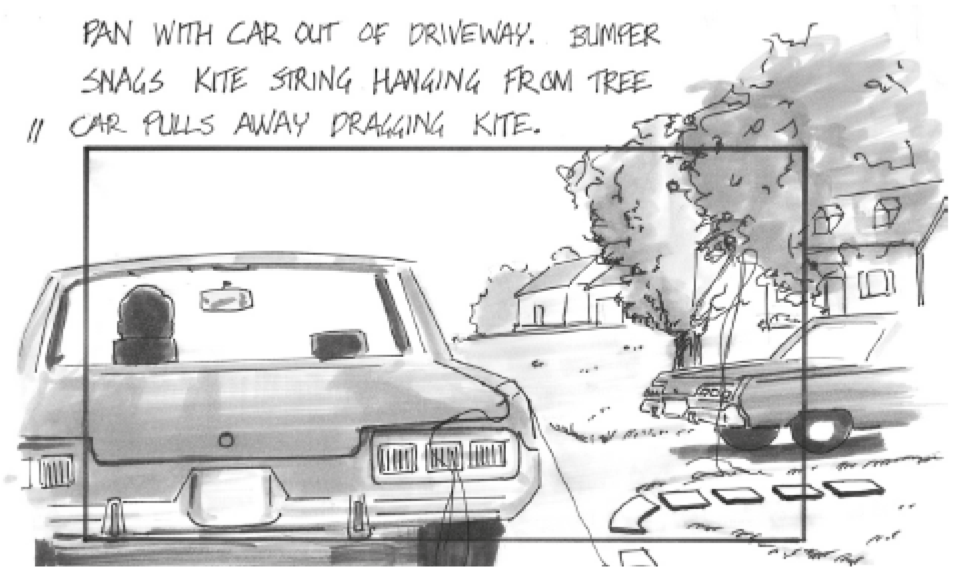
10

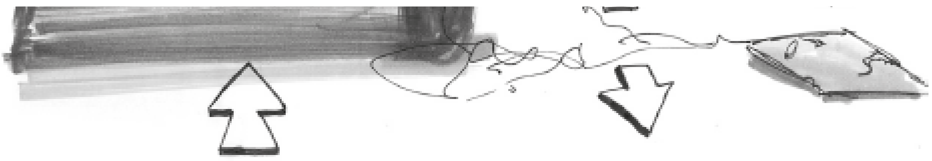


MOM OPENS FRONT DOOR. SHE SEES DAD LEAVING IN CAR. LOOKS DOWN AND SEES SNEAKER ON DOORSTEP.

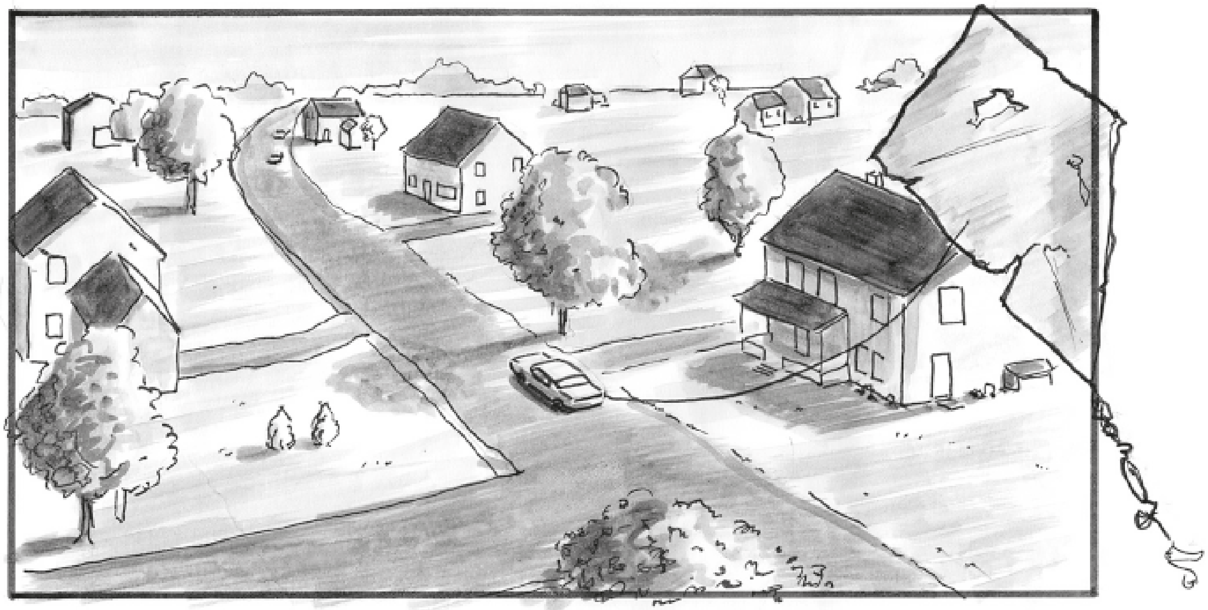
PAN WITH CAR OUT OF DRIVEWAY. BUMPER SNAGS KITE STRING HANGING FROM TREE

11 CAR PULLS AWAY DRAGGING KITE.





12



DAD'S CAR ENTERS FRAME. AFTER A FEW SECONDS KITE APPEARS. - END OF SEQUENCE -

The Filmmaker's Analysis

The filmmaker stops at this point because he has exhausted the possibilities for this latest approach to the opening. Many of the ideas could be improved and simplified if tracking and panning were permitted, but for now the filmmaker is more concerned with the overall tone and sense of the scene. There is no point in refining ideas pictorially if they will be rejected because they do not serve the narrative. The filmmaker feels that his solutions and story points are whimsical — the parallel forgetfulness of father and son and the gag with the kite — but the point of view of the boy has been lost in creating a plot-heavy opening. As a single lyrical element, the kite might still work, but after the opening shot, the point of view of the scene should move to the boy and remain with him. The filmmaker enters this in his notebook for a later version of the same scene.

Summary

A few words about this last storyboard sequence. A more fully worked out storyboard might show each stage of action by repeating the moving object in the frame. This is the case in panel 6, where the mother is pictured in the room twice. In panel 7, however, the appearance of the boy's left foot followed by his right foot is shown in a single panel, with an explanation in the caption. Since our filmmaker is familiar with cutting options and the details of the staging, and is designing his own panels, there is no danger of confusion. However, when storyboarding the action for another director, it's important to include every significant movement so that there are no misunderstandings.

9 Staging Dialogue Sequences

When staging dialogue scenes for the camera, the director must fulfill two goals: the honest expression of human relationships and the presentation of these relationships to the viewer. The first goal is determined by the script and the actor's performance. The second goal is determined by staging, cinematography, and editing. On the set, however, the director often finds that the actor's process and the practical and dramatic requirements of the camera are at odds. There is no right or wrong solution to this classical opposition, only what works best for the filmmaker in a given situation.

A Method for Visualizing Staging

In the arts, technique is largely a matter of improved perception. In music, for example, this means learning to hear more accurately; in film it means learning to see more precisely. Specifically, cinematic "vision" relies on spatial memory and recognition, skills that can be learned and refined. This will be our goal in the next several chapters.

First, we will need a basic vocabulary of shots and actor placement. Any system of construction will suffice provided the filmmaker uses its elements consistently. For our purpose, the Hollywood continuity style offers a familiar set of solutions that can be broken down into a system of building blocks. This programmed approach, however, is not simply intended to offer stock solutions. By knowing the basic ways in which people position themselves in conversation and the accompanying camera setups used to record them, you will have a secure base from which to improvise, break rules, and take creative risks.

This spatial approach is made up of five basic areas:

- Staging stationary actors
- Staging moving actors
- Using the depth of the frame
- Staging camera movement
- Staging camera movement and actor movement together

The first building blocks we'll look at are staging patterns for two subjects. In the photoboard examples camera angles, lenses, and editing patterns will be compared so that you can see how slight adjustments alter our understanding of a scene. Once the staging patterns for two subjects are established, we can apply these same general principles to three- and four-subject situations in subsequent chapters.

Before getting to the actual examples, we should first look at some of the basic staging conventions with the understanding that they represent the starting point for new ideas rather than the limits of what is permissible.

Frontality

This is a basic convention of Western art. Frontality is just a way of saying that the subjects of a picture tend to face the viewer or, in the case of film, the camera. Many staging arrangements in the movies are basically frontal, meaning that subjects in conversation tend to face the camera rather than each other. This type of body positioning is not without precedence in real life, but in films, it is often adjusted to the camera's needs.

A scene that stages actors in a frontal position can be recorded in a single master shot. If, however, one of the actors is turned away from the camera (partially or completely) more than one camera angle is necessary to see both actors' faces. This represents the two major editing approaches to staging: one in which the actors face a single camera setup and the other in which multiple camera viewpoints are edited together.

The Master Shot

The master shot is the one-shot that is wide enough to include all the actors in the scene and that runs for the entire length of the action. When directors speak of the master, they usually mean that it is part of a plan of coverage that includes other camera setups in the triangle system that will eventually be edited together. But there are also times when the master shot is the only shot the director feels is necessary.

The Sequence Shot

Normally, the camera remains motionless in the master shot, particularly if cutting to other camera angles is anticipated. If the master is a moving shot, the camera is fluidly repositioned with a dolly throughout the course of the scene, essentially combining several camera angles into a single shot that in an edited sequence would be obtained by individual shots. This approach to staging is also called the sequence shot, and usually employs movement of the actors along with the traveling camera. Generally, the sequence shot respects frontality more than an edited sequence. This is because editing permits, and routinely links, shots that are opposed by as much as 180 degrees. The equivalent change in a sequence shot (which is really a long dolly shot) is very nearly impossible to do quickly, let alone repeatedly. Therefore, the moving camera in a dialogue sequence shot tends to maintain a general viewing direction. We will look at this more closely in the chapter on mobile blocking.

Shot Size and Distance

One version of the master shot, the medium two-shot, was so characteristic of American films of the '30s and '40s that the French call it the "plan américain," or the "American shot." In the early '30s, the two-shot was used to cover entire dialogue sequences without resorting to close-ups. This was due in part to the advent of sound in pictures and the long stretches of dialogue that accompanied them. The cumbersome, "blimped" cameras were less mobile than the cameras used for silent films, and the two-shot reduced the need to move the camera. This technical limitation was quickly overcome, but the two-shot remained in use for years because it was found to be a relaxed framing device for comedies and musicals.

Personally, I like the distance and objectivity that two-shot and full figure shots afford. The body can be wonderfully expressive, and people often use body language to indicate their relationship to others — for example, by where they stand in a room or by their different ways of approaching a rival, friend, or lover. The way a person moves can be as distinctive as his or her voice, and most of us can identify a friend at a distance by some characteristic gesture long before we see his or her face. Expressive body movement falls within the range of the full shot and the medium shot. Entire scenes can be staged effectively at this distance without ever resorting to a close-up.

The Shot, Reverse Shot Pattern

When players are seen in alternating close-ups, the shot, reverse shot pattern is one of the most useful solutions. No cutting strategy better represents the Hollywood style than this one. The popularity of this setup is that it offers the widest range of cutting options and includes two important advantages that the two-shot lacks. The first advantage is that we get to see a subject's isolated reaction to dialogue; the second is that the point of view changes within the scene. In addition, the eyeline match between one character and another helps to establish a sense of spatial unity.

Sight Lines and Eye Contact

In any shot of one actor, the closer the sight line is to the camera the more intimate our contact with the actor will be. In the most extreme case, the actor can look directly into the lens and make eye contact with the viewer. This very confrontational relationship can be quite startling.

The most frequent use of direct eye contact is in subjective camera sequences in which the audience is made to see things through the eyes of one of the characters. This is relatively infrequent in narrative film, and most of the time dialogue scenes are shot with the sight lines of the actors slightly to the left or right of the camera. In this case, it is common practice to maintain the same distance from the camera for sight lines in alternating close-ups of two or more actors. Figure 9.1 is a comparison of setups for close-ups, each illustrating a different sight line relative to the camera.

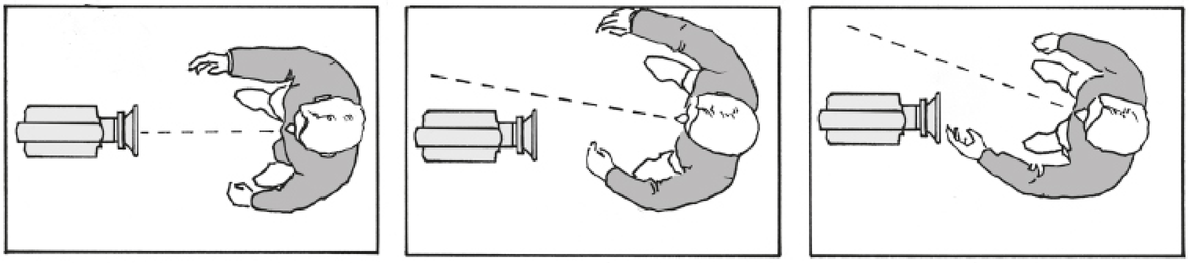


Figure 9.1

Once you have acquired some feel for the psychological and dramatic implications of sight lines and eye contact, you will be able to make subtle shifts within a sequence for dramatic emphasis.

The Staging System

Unless a director spends a great deal of time training himself to see all the possibilities of setup and actor placement, he usually relies on a few all-purpose strategies for any scene. If he allows his actors greater freedom, interesting new options may arise, but unless he has a solid command of staging for the camera, the production process will ultimately undermine his experimentation. The director will find himself at odds with the cinematographer and producer, who won't understand why he keeps restaging a scene, with the consequent loss of time and, frequently, the spontaneity of his cast.

The skill this director lacks is the ability to visualize the actors and camera in space, and the composition that will result from any combination of these elements. This is where the pattern system of staging comes in.

Letter Patterns

The staging system we will be using from this point on identifies two categories of actor placement: pattern and position. We will discuss pattern first.

> **Pattern:** There are three basic *patterns* of figure deployment in a frame. We will call them the "A," "I," and "L" patterns. These are the letters that grouped players resemble when viewed from above.

The significance of the patterns is that *they are the simplest arrangement of actors according to the line of action*. Therefore, staging patterns relate to *camera placement*.

As you can see on the following page, the A and L patterns require three or more players to complete the letter shape. The only arrangement for two subjects is the I pattern. Figure 9.2 illustrates all three patterns.

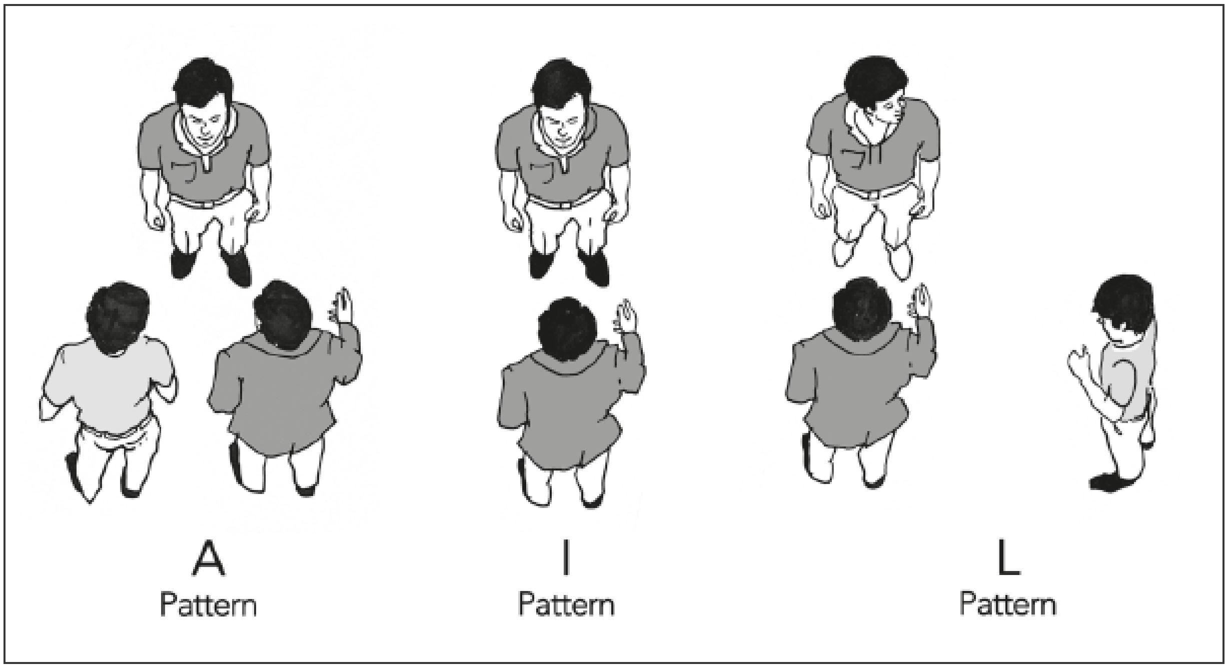


Figure 9.2: Patterns.

> **Position:** This refers to the direction the subjects are facing within a pattern. For any given pattern, there can be many positions.

Most importantly, position relates to the composition of the frame. This means that once the camera has been placed for a given pattern, the more subtle arrangement of the actors (the direction they face in the frame) is determined by their positions. An experienced director will consider pattern and position simultaneously, but in the beginning, they are more easily understood as separate concepts. Three typical positions in the I pattern are shown in Figure 9.3.

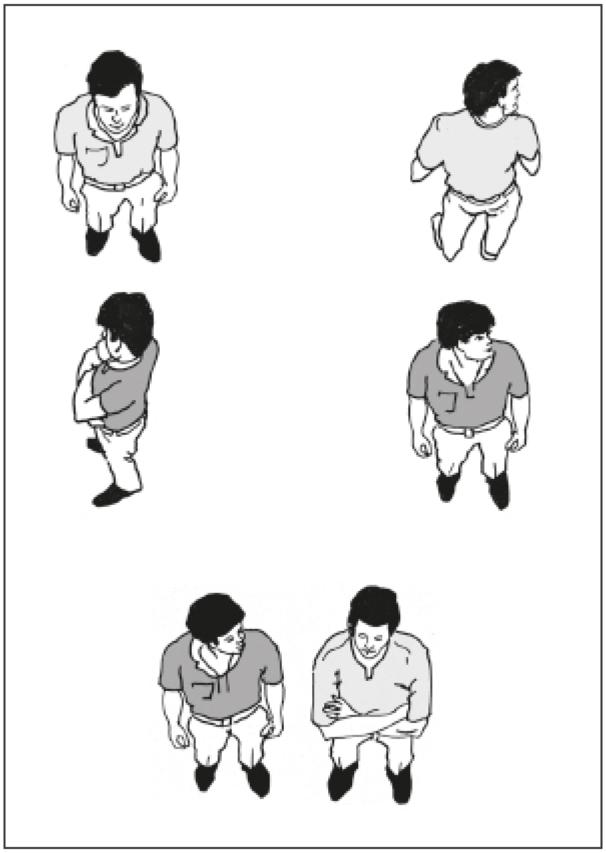


Figure 9.3: Patterns. All the positions are in the I pattern.

One last point: **The I pattern for two players is the basic building block in our system.** This is because the line of action can be established between only two people at a time. When there are more than two people in a conversation, the line of action moves as explained in Chapter 6. This is good news since we will only have to learn the positions for two subjects in order to apply them to larger groups. From the cameraman's point of view, the I pattern is found in the A and L patterns whenever a series of close-ups and singles are required.

Staging Dialogue for Two Subjects

For the sake of clarity, most of the photoboards in this chapter are shot in simple surroundings staged for the static camera. Later, we'll see how camera movement or movement by the players can be substituted for cutting. For now, the camera is locked down, and the photoboard sequences represent multiple camera angles that have been edited together.

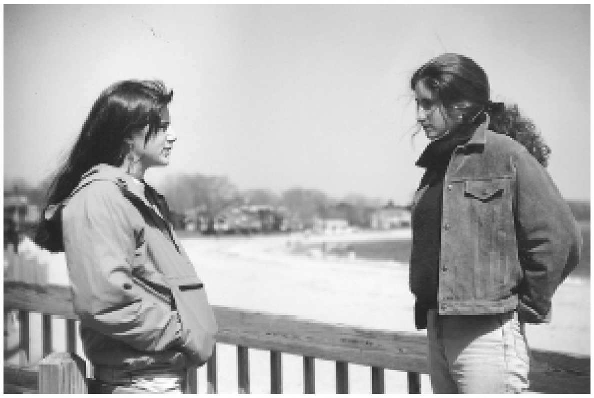
POSITION ONE

Face-to-Face

The most basic positioning of two people in conversation is facing each other with their shoulders parallel. The first option is to frame the subjects in profile, as shown in the first six panels.

Compositionally, this staging allows for powerful subject oppositions. In this setup, we do not get to see much of the players' expressions unless the composition is very tight (frame 6). If individual CUs are used the camera is usually repositioned for reverse OTS shots, although individual profile CUs are certainly possible.

1



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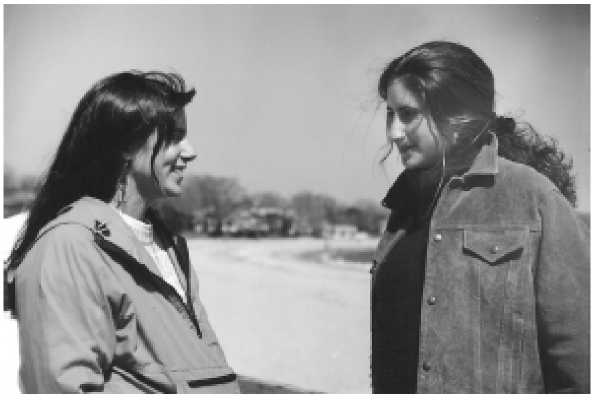

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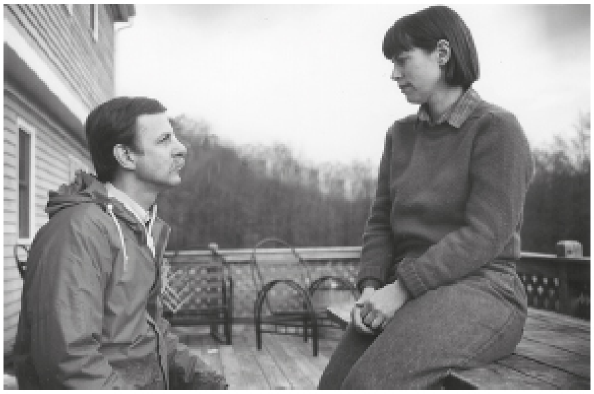

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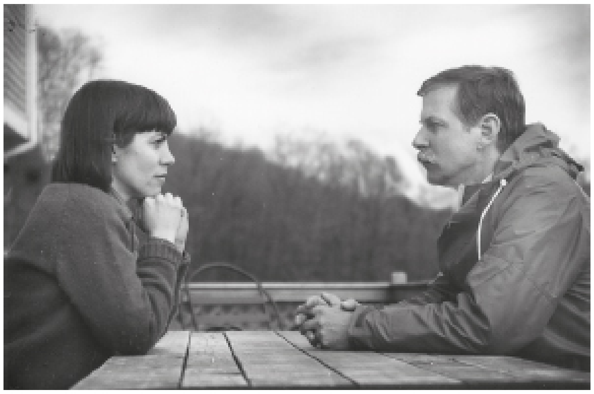

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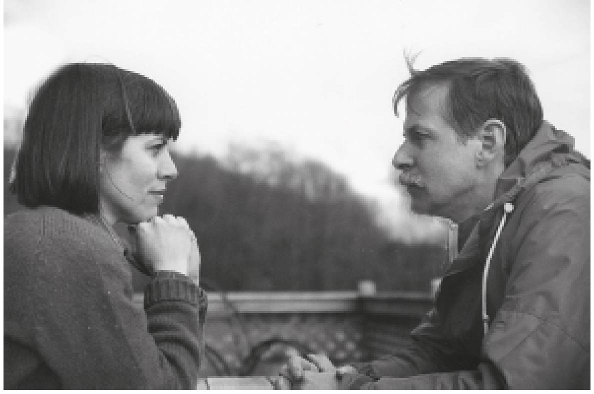

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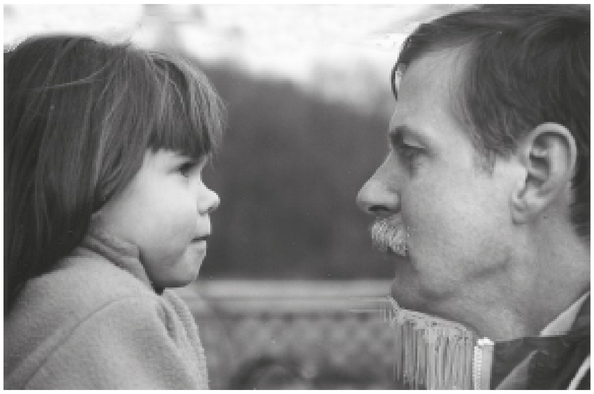


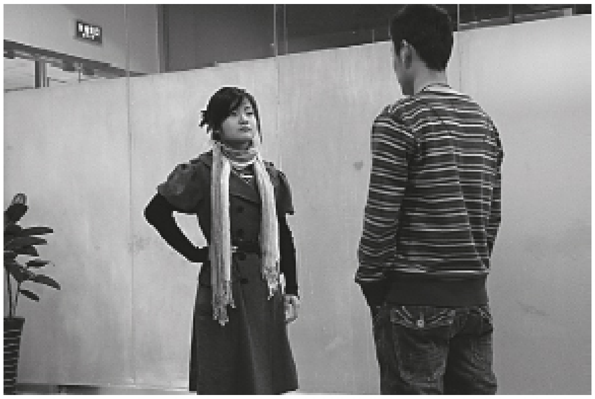
POSITION ONE

OTS

This next series shows the classic shot, reverse shot pattern in over-the-shoulder framings. These might be the logical follow-up shots to the profile stagings on the previous page. Though OTS shots are usually shot as matched pairs maintaining consistent lens and framing choices, mixed pairs can be edited together. In a continuous exchange of dialogue, however, matched pairs are more commonplace.

In tight framings, there are two major strategies for the OTS shots. Frames 3 and 4 include the foreground subject's entire head in the frame. In frames 5 and 6, virtually one third to one half of the frame is blocked off, strongly isolating the player facing us.

1



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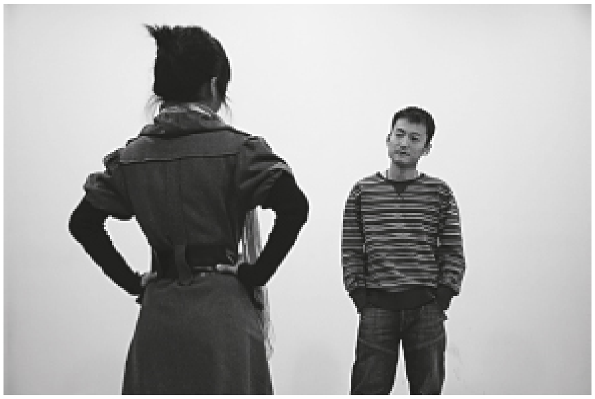

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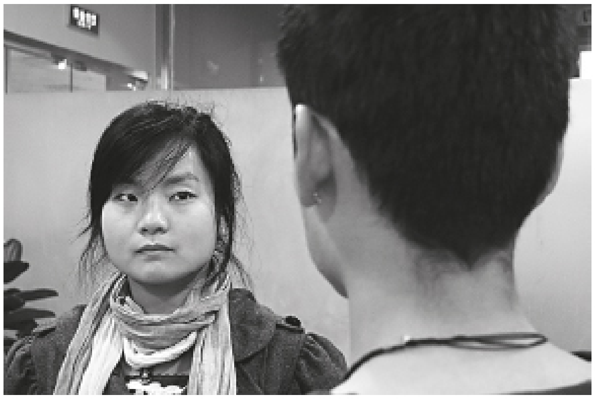

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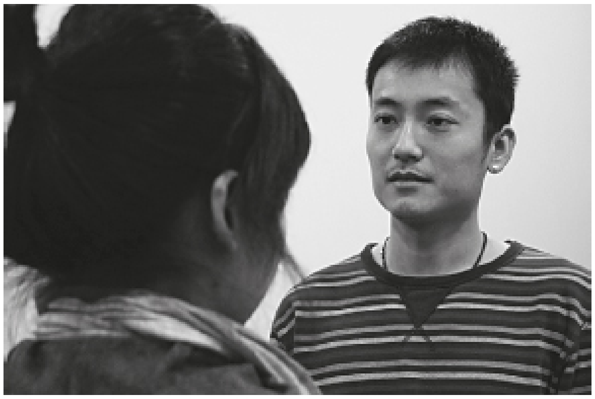

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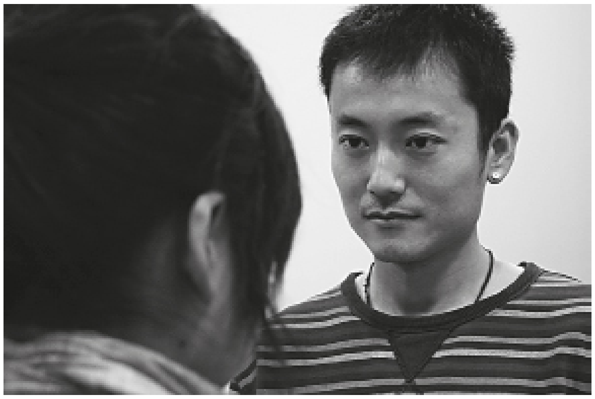

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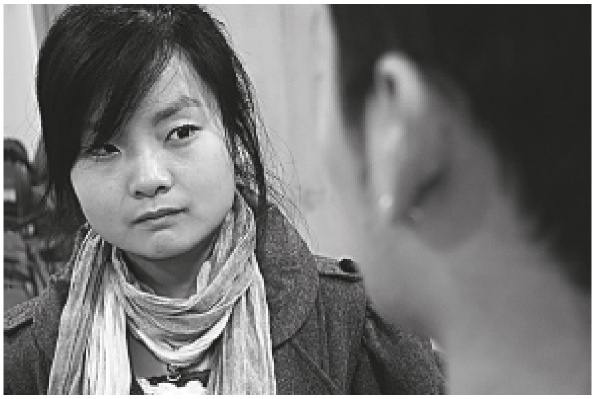
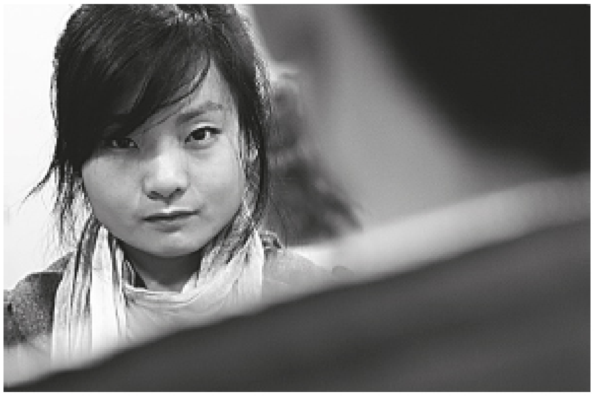


POSITION ONE

Long Lens OTS

In the next series of OTS shots (frames 1–6), still using Position One staging, the focal length of the lens begins at 120 mm and is increased to 200 mm. The results are easy to see. Notice that for the first time the framing device of the face is a true over-the-shoulder shot since we see the shoulder and neck of the framing subject. This combination of lens and tight framing produces a more intimate feeling than would be obtained with a wider lens.

1



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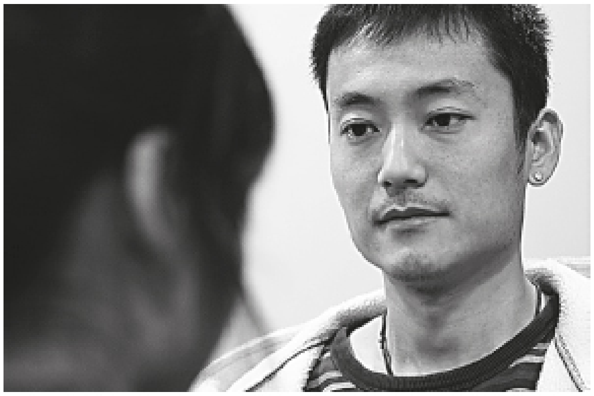

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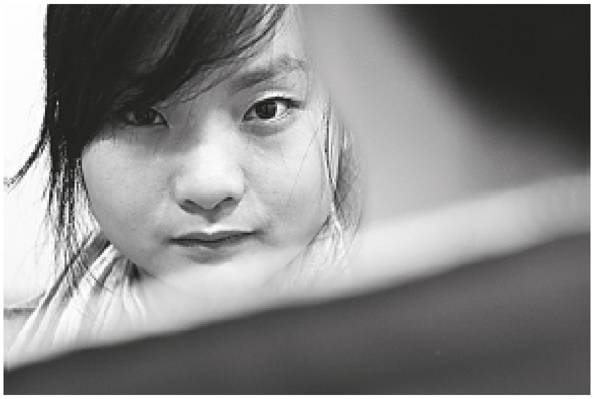

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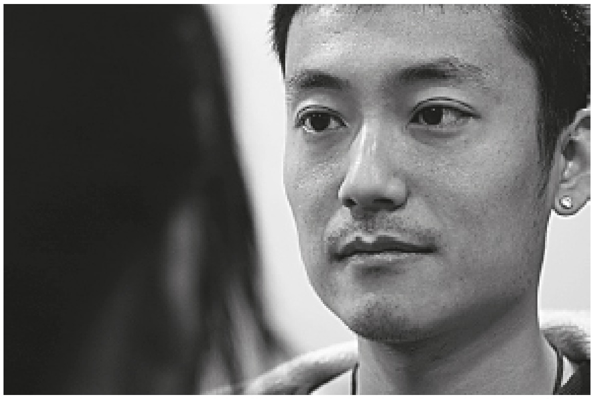

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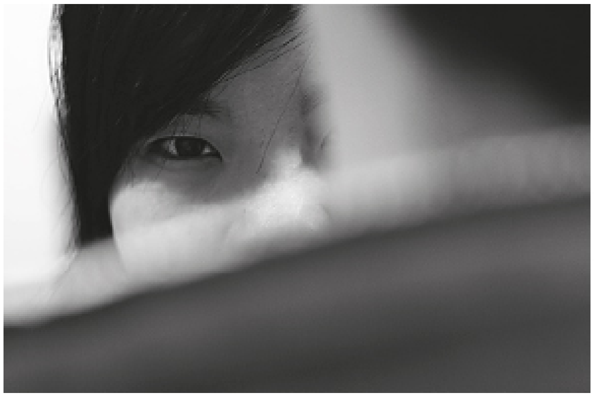

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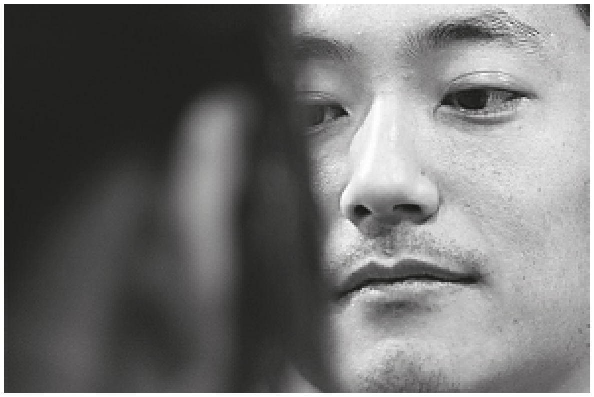
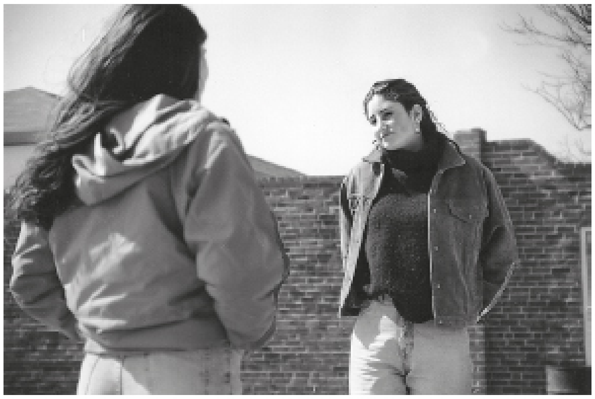


POSITION ONE

Low-Angle Reverse Shots

Another version of the shot, reverse shot pattern of Position One is seen in this next series, which can be described as over-the-hip shots. These are dynamic, low-angle positions that tend to put the subjects in an adversarial relationship. Frames 1 and 2 are only slightly low-angle and do not separate the subjects as much as do frames 3 and 4, which are shot from a camera height of 3 feet. In frames 5 and 6, the focal length of the lens is increased (100 mm) to lose focus on the foreground-framing subject, thus emphasizing the background figure.

1



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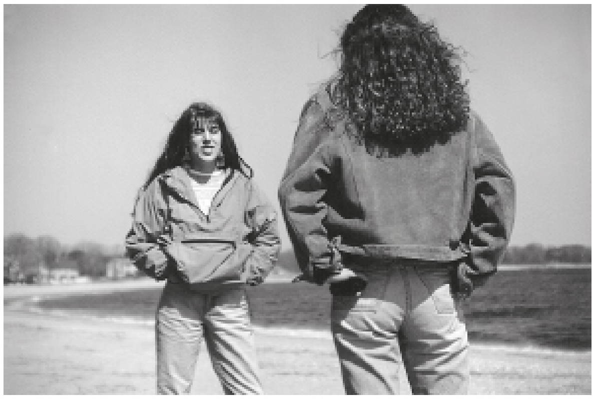

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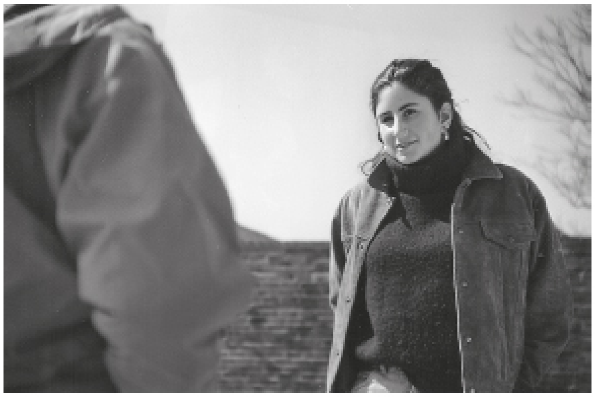

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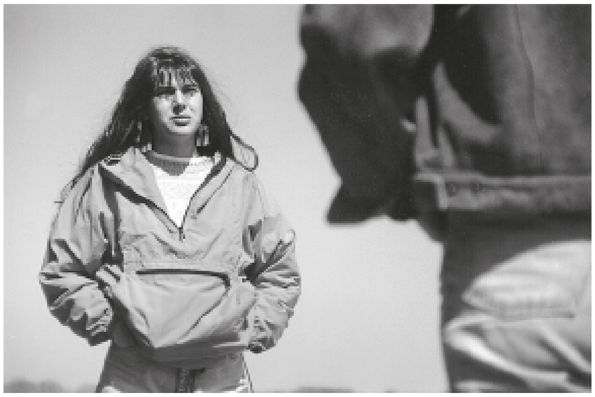

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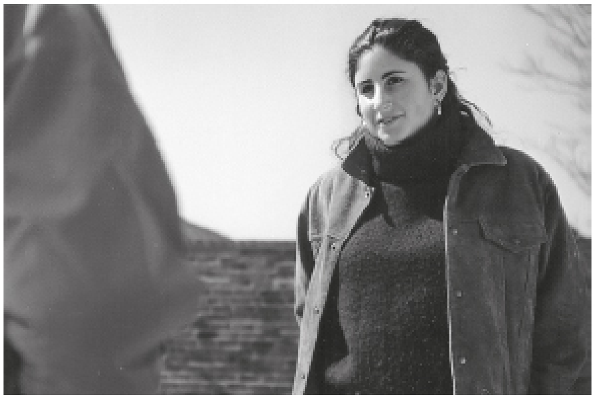

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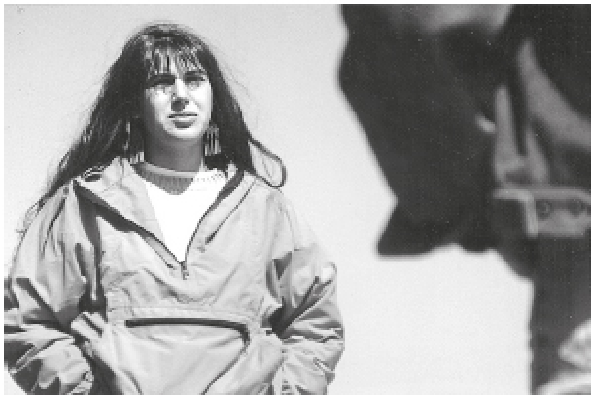


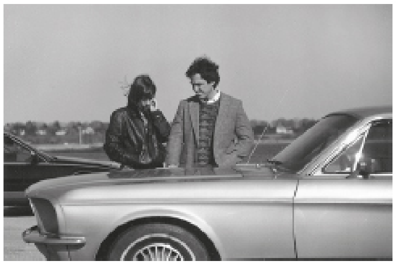
POSITION TWO

Shoulder-to-Shoulder

This basically frontal positioning offers more options than most others because players can be seen full face or in profile in the same shot. In our example, the subjects are faced forward, looking at a road map spread on the hood of the car, but when the couple speaks to one another, they turn in profile to the camera.

Frames 1–3 are straightforward two-shots. Any of these could serve as a master shot, although frame 1 is somewhat wide for a conversation. Try to imagine a dialogue scene as you look at these frames. You will probably find that the size of the shot will affect what type of scene comes to mind. You can probably think of this as a reverse exercise since you will most often face the opposite situation: imagining a shot for a scene in a script.

1



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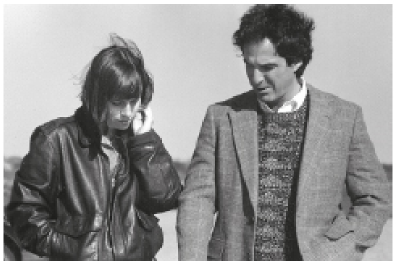

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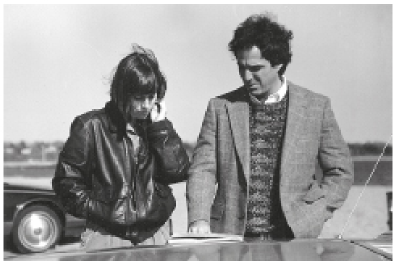
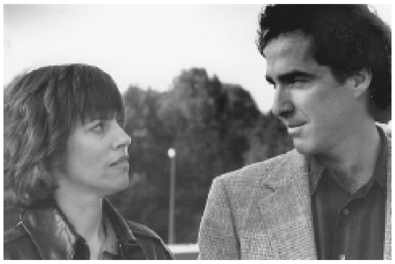


Frames 4, 5, and 6 illustrate an actual sequence. We begin with the profile two-shot in frame 4 and move into profile close-ups in frames 5 and 6. The camera would be moved in for the CUs, but it would still be directed along the same angle of view as for the open two-shot. (In my opinion, this use of CUs tends to break up the scene, though in the continuity style it's a perfectly legitimate cut.)

4



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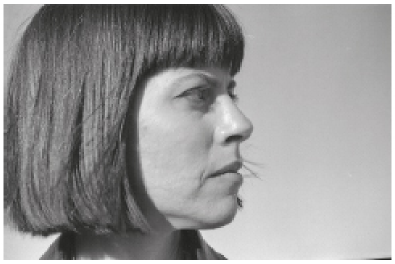

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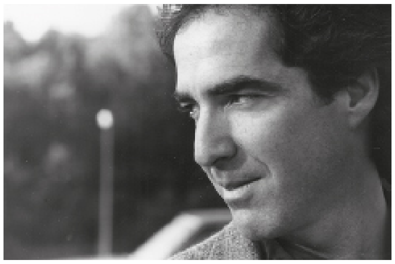
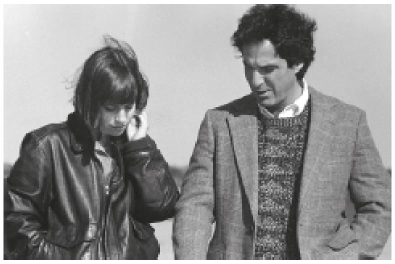


In frames 7–9, we open with the medium two-shot. This time we have replaced the CUs of the previous version with a profile two-shot by moving the camera around to the side and subsequently reversing to the OTS shot. Unfortunately, the framings don't fill the frame as much as I would like to see. If this were a storyboard, I would know in advance that the shots should be tighter.

7



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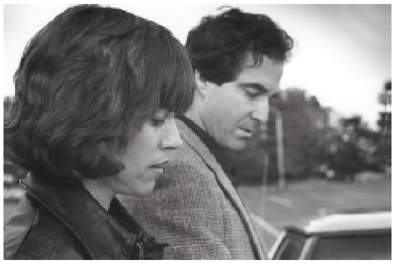

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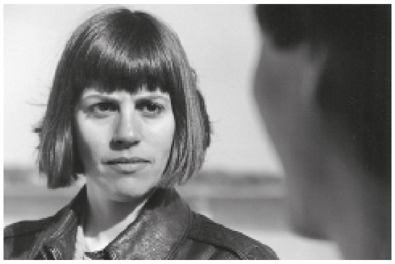
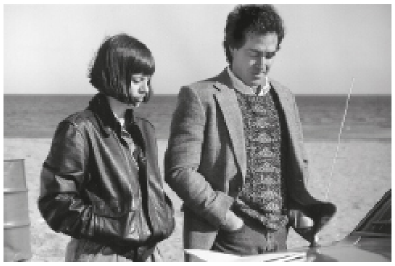


In this last series, frames 10–12, we begin with the master shot followed by two close-ups. This time we open with an angular two-shot. The camera is moved to the side for the shot, reverse shot CUs. Compare these with the two profile CU shots we used earlier in frame 5 and 6. Notice that these newer CUs give a stronger sense of presence. This happens because each subject in the CU is looking in our (the camera's) direction — in a sense, including us in the scene.

7



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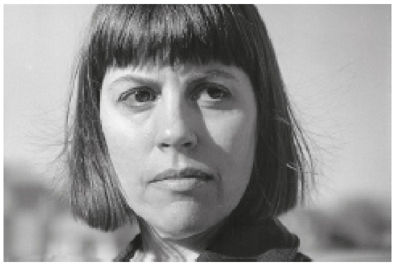

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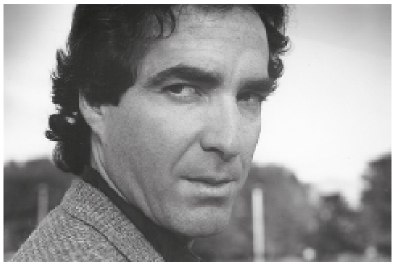

POSITION THREE

This basic staging deploys the figures at an angle of 90 degrees. This is a compromise between the parallel shoulder arrangement of Position One and the shoulder-to-shoulder arrangement of Position Two. It is a more casual pose, not one you would expect to see if the couple were arguing or having an intimate conversation. The looser relationship allows the couple to look away from one another and vary their head positions.

In the angular two-shot shown in frames 1 and 2, the player facing the camera is in the favored position. This type of setup is similar to the OTS shots, and we expect to see a reverse of the player in the secondary position.

The head-on two-shot in frames 3 and 4 puts the players on an equal basis and so is the logical choice for a master shot if no close-ups or reverses are used. The alternative is to have the player in the secondary position turn towards the camera to obtain the equivalent of a reverse shot. As with any of the “I” patterns, OTSs and CUs can be used, although this tends to force the subjects into the more direct relationship of Position Two. One way of maintaining the angular positioning is by composing the two-shot very tightly and closing the space between the subjects. A shot, reverse shot version of this is shown in frames 5 and 6.

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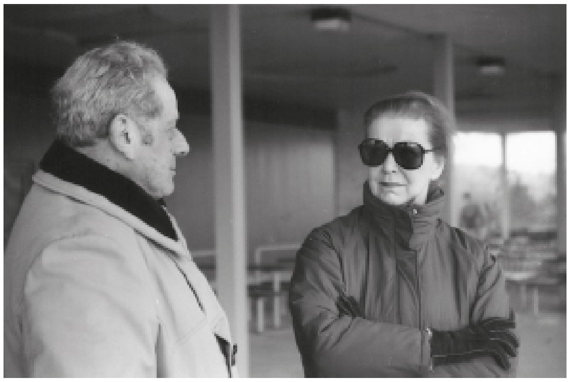

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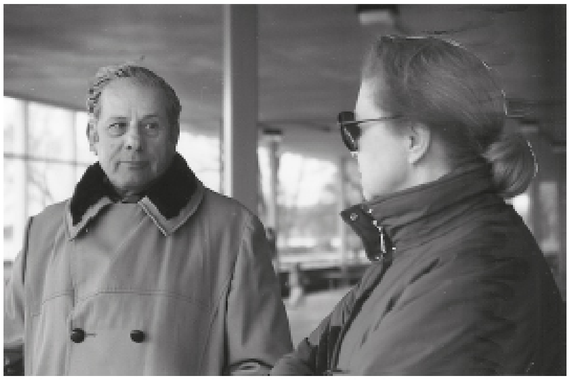

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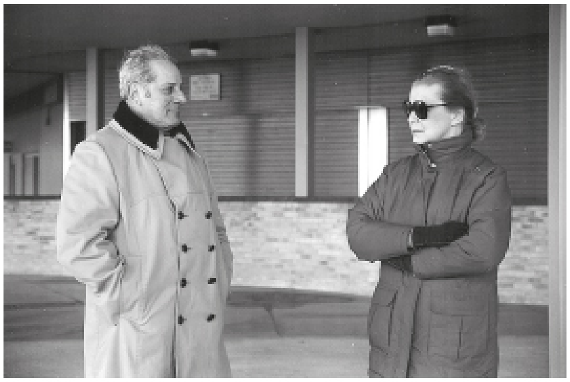

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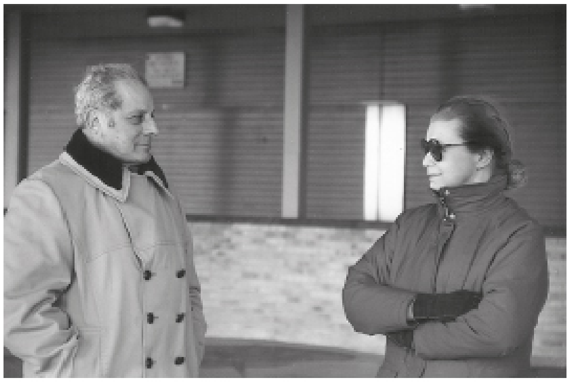

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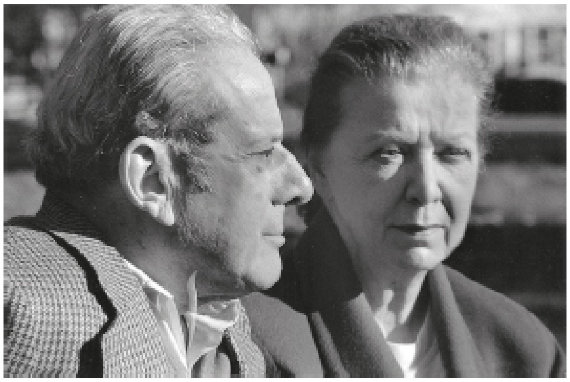

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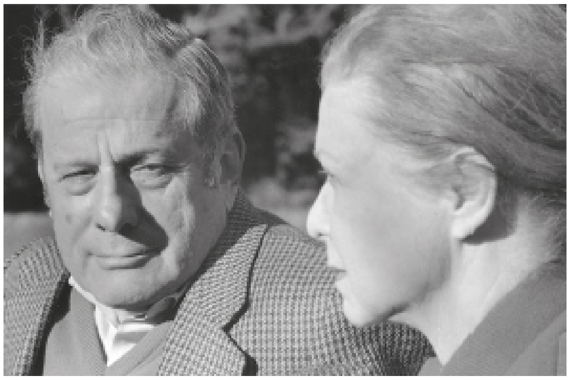


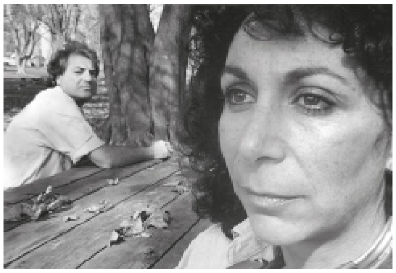
POSITION FOUR

Beginning with Position Four, we will look at stagings that create tension. In all cases, this is due to the absence of eye contact between the players. In this series, the woman has turned from her partner, and the sense of separation is clear. This type of framing puts the viewer in a privileged position because we can see what the man cannot: the woman’s reactions to his words.

Staging in depth in this way clearly places us in a closer relationship with one of the players. This is a definite choice of point of view that depends on the basic frontality of the scene. A reverse shot in this staging would drastically alter the point of view. If a more neutral relationship with the players is desired, there are other, probably better, stagings that can be used. As you can see, I have not used any reverse shots with this staging, which is inherently frontal.

In frame 1, the two-shot is composed in depth with a 30 mm lens. The result is that slight distortion can be seen in the foreground player and the player in the background seems far away even though the players are only separated by the length of a picnic table.

1



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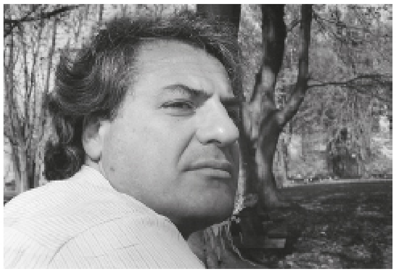

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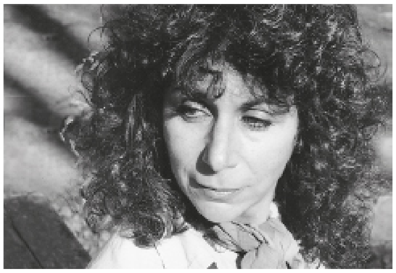
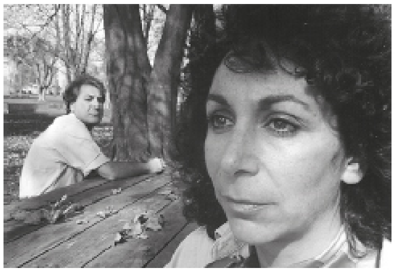


Frames 4, 5, and 6 present a slightly modified alternative. The opening two-shot is looser, allowing the viewer some breathing room. The close-up in frame 5 also has been made wider (almost a medium shot) to give the frame a more relaxed feeling. Frame 6 shows a lower angle close-up. Compare the feeling of this frame to frame 3 above. The result of these changes is that the sequence is less insistent.

4



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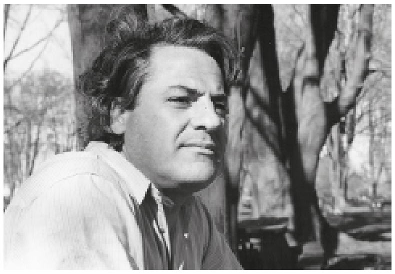

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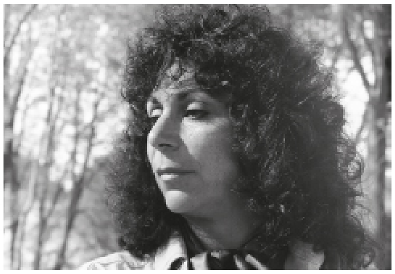

POSITION FIVE

This is another staging that tends toward separation and tension. The body language of the woman's folded arms and the man's hands in his pockets or on his hips contributes to the interpretation of the scene. The framing can be used to emphasize the dramatic situation but is essentially neutral as to which actor is dominant. In the version shown, the woman refuses to look at the man. This, of course, is a type of control, and we can imagine that the man is placed in a position of weakness. We could just as easily propose a scene in which the man is confronting the woman with some lie she has told. In this case, the man would be in the dominant role.

We begin with a high angle in frame 1. This view usually serves to create tension and isolation. The open surroundings contribute to this feeling. The cut to the two-shot in frame 2 is a legitimate edit, but I would prefer to show the players separated more. The next sequence (frames 3 and 4) shows a pair of reversed angular shots.

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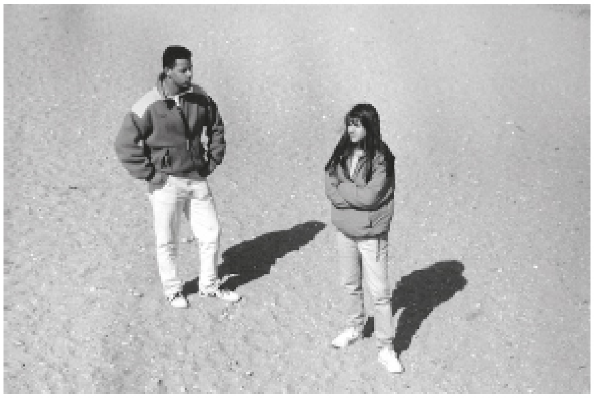

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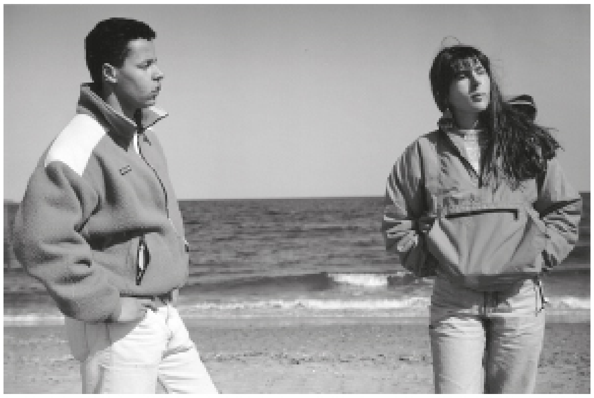

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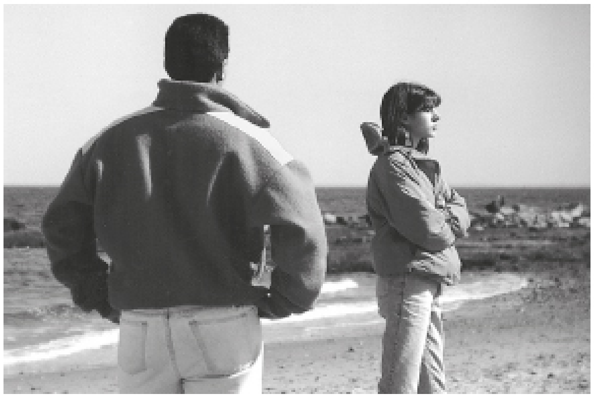

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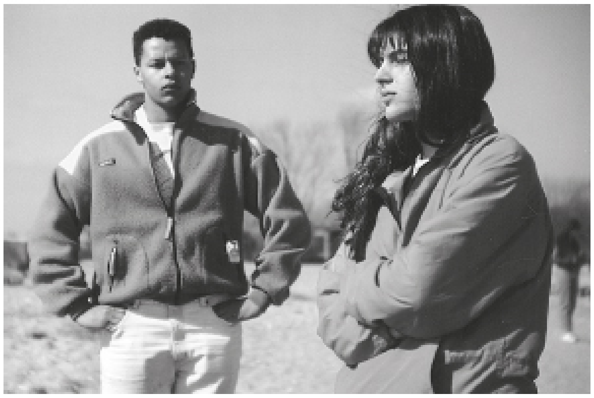
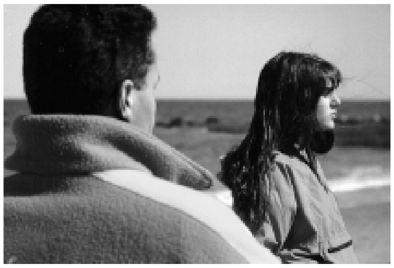


In frames 5 and 6, we see a pair of tighter reverse shots. In these shots, the framing combines a CU framing and a medium shot. The obvious difference is that frame 6 features both players' faces, while frame 5 is really an OTS shot.

If it is necessary to withhold the woman's expression, we could frame the scene from the opposite side of the action in the previous frames. In this case, we will be crossing the line of action.

This staging would open with the high-angle shot in frame 7, cross the line to frame 8, and cross the line one last time to frame 9. This type of staging and shot sequence is not at all typical of the continuity style, but that is largely due to the unchallenged orthodoxy of the 180-degree convention. Do not automatically rule out a shot simply because it means crossing the line. If it works, use it.

5



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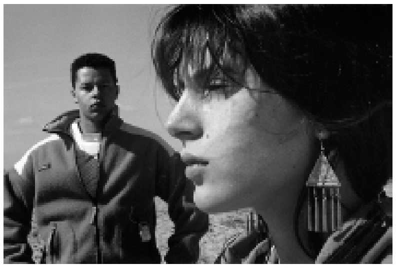

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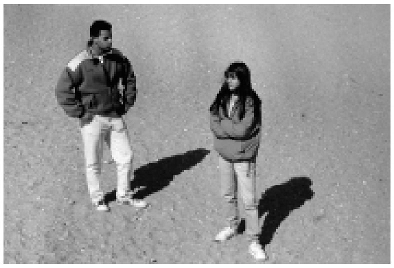

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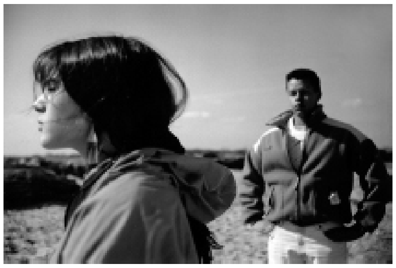

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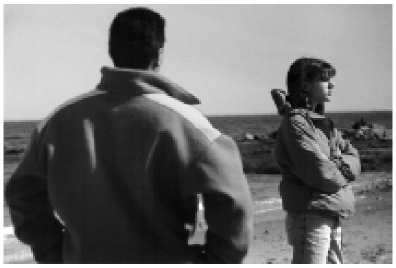
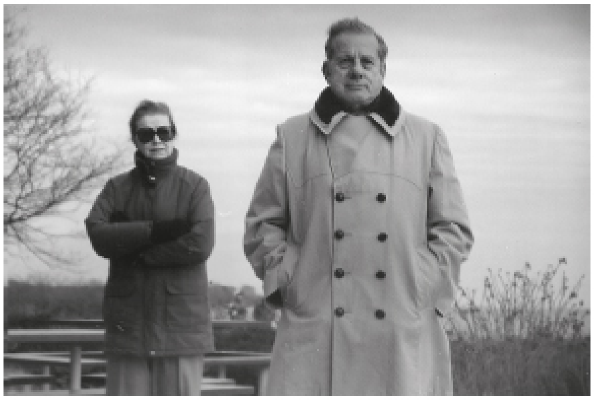


POSITION SIX

This dramatic staging withholds eye contact for much of its effect. The value of this staging is its clarity, related in a sense to the shoulder-to-shoulder two-shot. The difference is that in-depth staging encourages us to identify with the foreground player. My feeling about this type of setup is that over-cutting destroys the unity of the scene.

In frame 1 we see a wide shot of the setup, but frame 2 is probably the best distance for a master shot. In this type of staging, the background player has room to move, pace, turn around, or leave the frame momentarily, while the foreground player is restricted to a smaller space if both players are to remain within the frame. Frames 3 and 4 reveal the way in which identification can be controlled by placing us in an intimate relationship with the man. If cutting is used, the pair of close-ups in frames 5 and 6 retain the feeling of separation.

1



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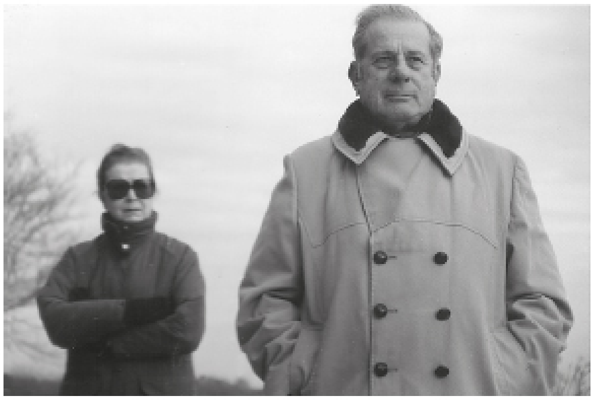

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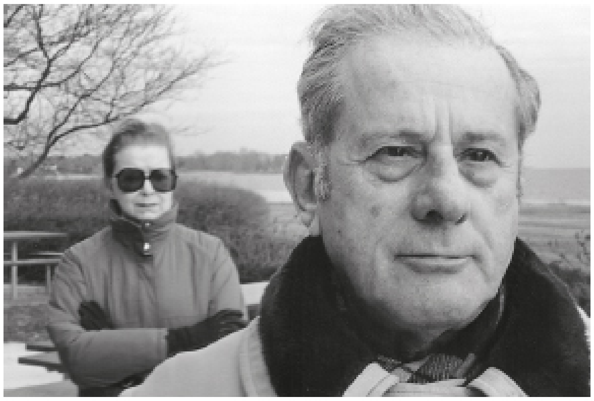

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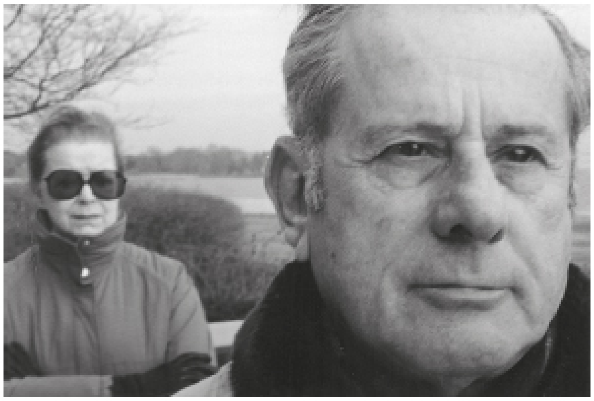

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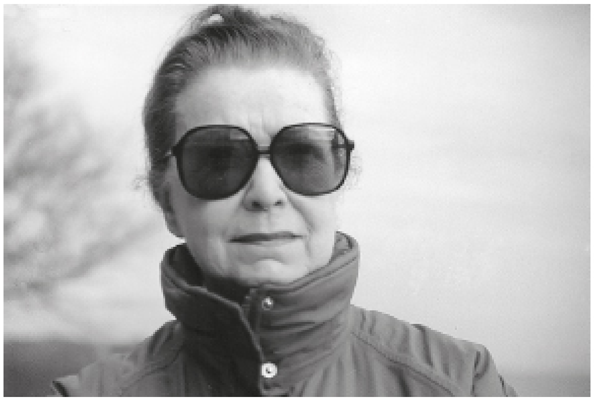

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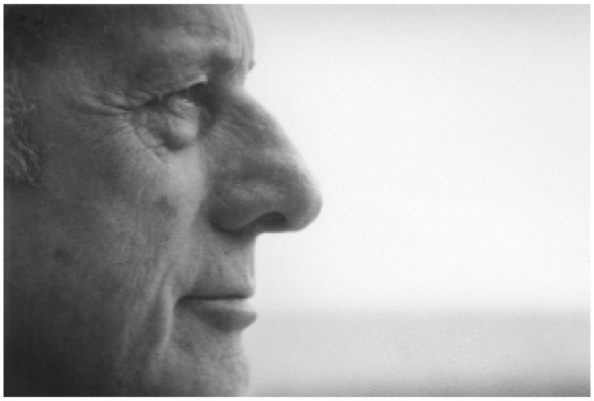
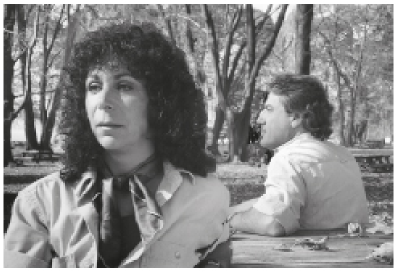


POSITION SEVEN

With this staging, we continue the deployment of players who do not make eye contact. Because both players are looking offscreen in different directions, the viewer's attention is divided between the background and the foreground players. This produces an offhanded, relaxed dramatic situation. Notice that the background player is looking past the foreground player. This directs the viewer's attention to the foreground player and unifies the shot.

Consider this series a comparison of close-ups. The middle close-up of the man is a good example of how shot size contributes to the spatial unity of the sequence. Learn to move your eyes over the images without studying them. Reading a storyboard is a matter of editing with your eyes. This becomes easier when you have an actual scene to imagine.

1



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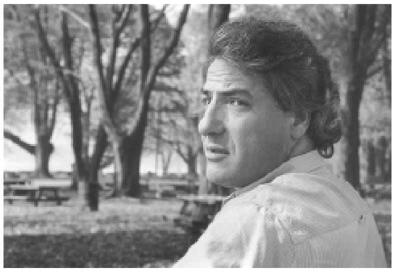

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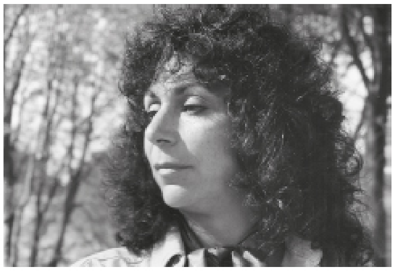

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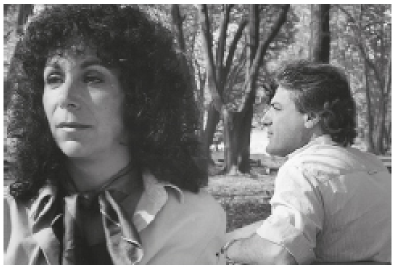

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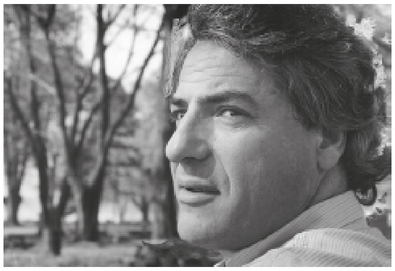

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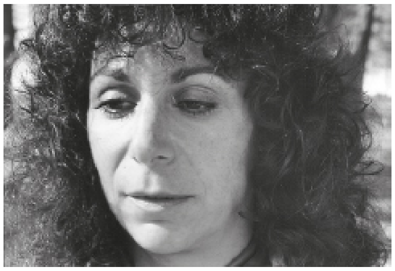

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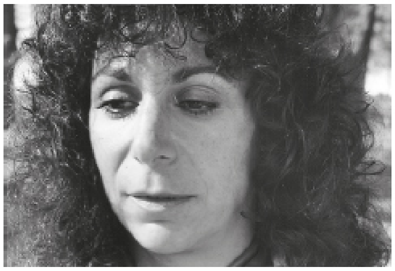

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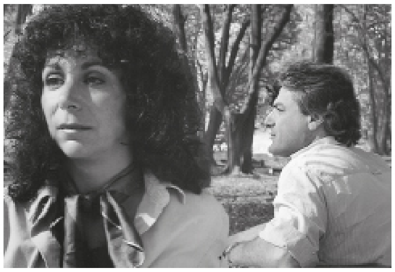

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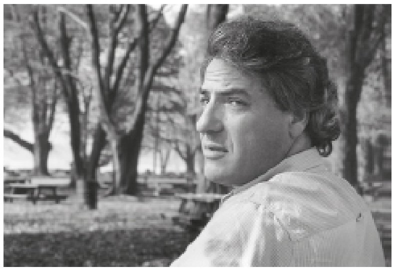
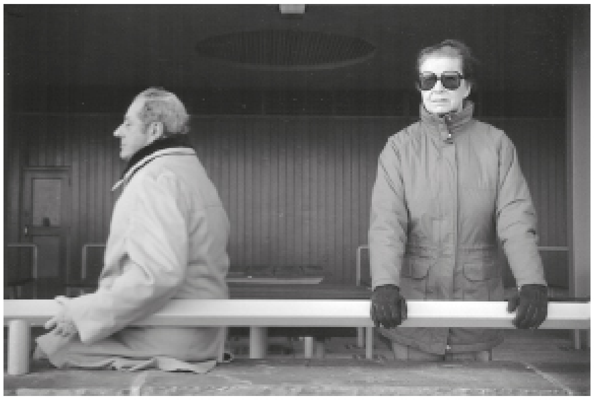


POSITION EIGHT

This next version is a variation on the previous staging. As before, the players are in a right-angle relationship, but this time the background player is looking away from the other player. The three pairs of photos serve as a good example of the different ways in which the viewer's relationship to the players is determined. In frames 1 and 2, the woman facing us is favored slightly. As a general rule, the player whose eyes are most clearly seen will dominate the shot. As we have seen before, in-depth staging encourages our identification with the foreground player. Finally, the angular shots in frames 5 and 6 tend to balance the attention of the figures since both players are turned away from the camera.

1



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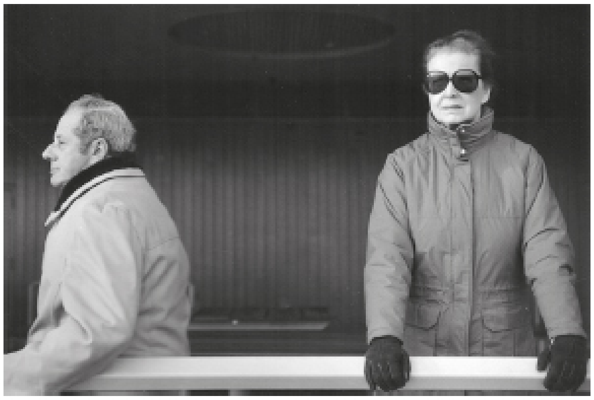

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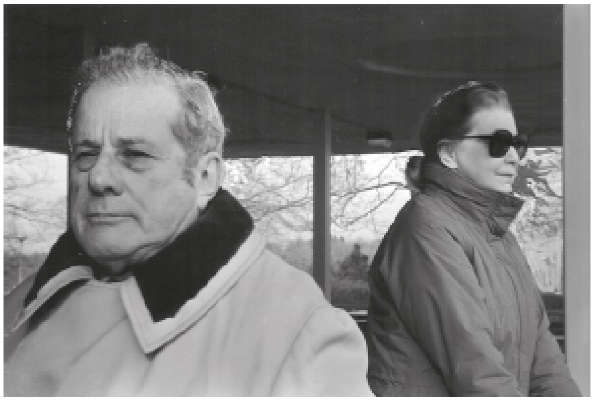

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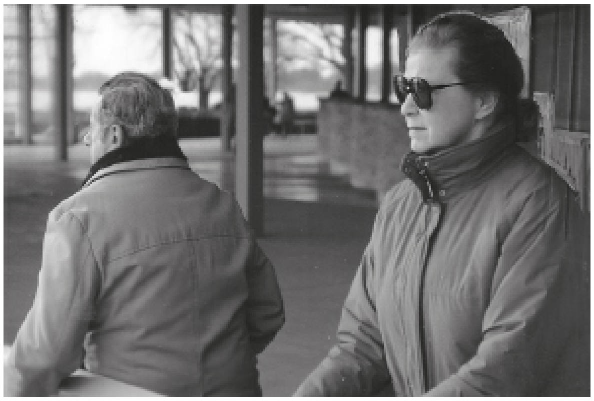

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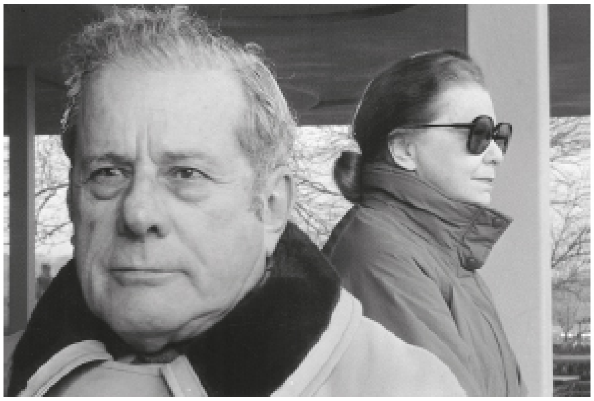

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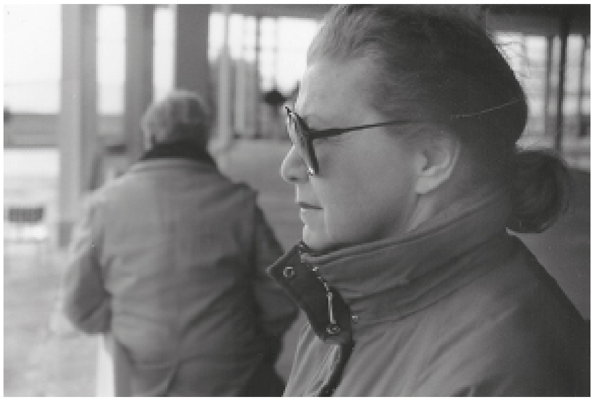
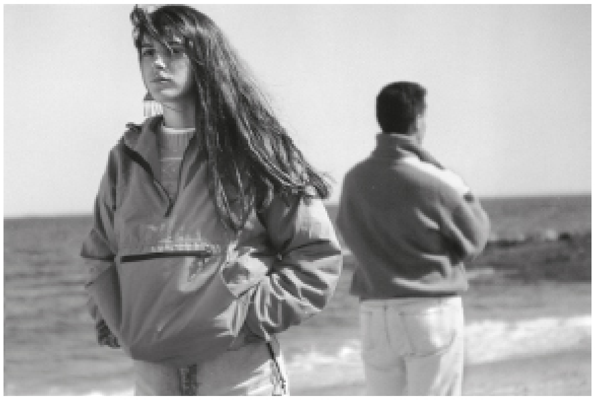


POSITION NINE

This series features a staging that has the players so completely opposed that it seems as though it belongs in a musical comedy. This is only true if we imagine that the players are aware of each other and have taken a defiant stance. We can change this very easily if we imagine that the scene is set on a railroad platform and that the man has been hired to follow the woman. The man moves into the crowd and stands with his back to her. In this case, the staging would be suited to a thriller, not a comedy.

Comparing the stagings in frames 1 through 4 you will see that the somewhat stylized positioning in frames 1 and 2 is less artificial looking as we move closer in frames 3 and 4.

1



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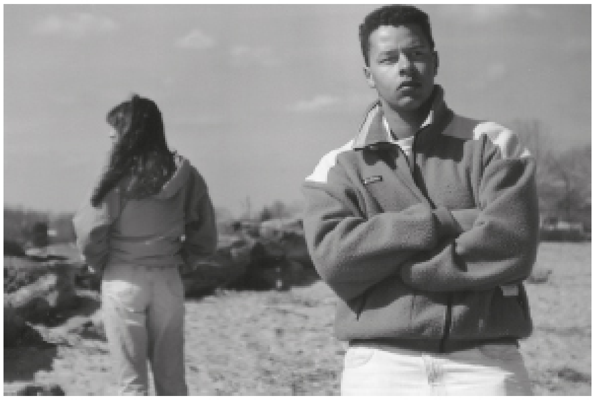

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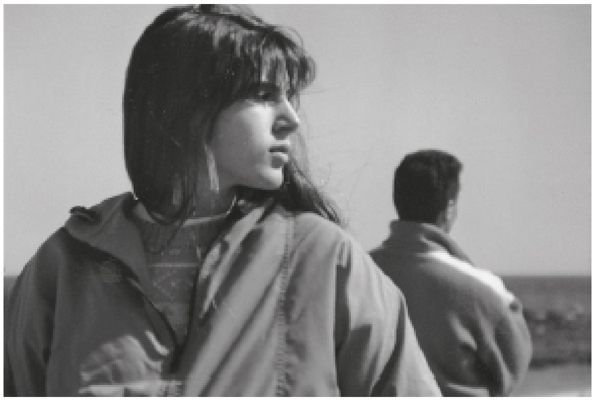

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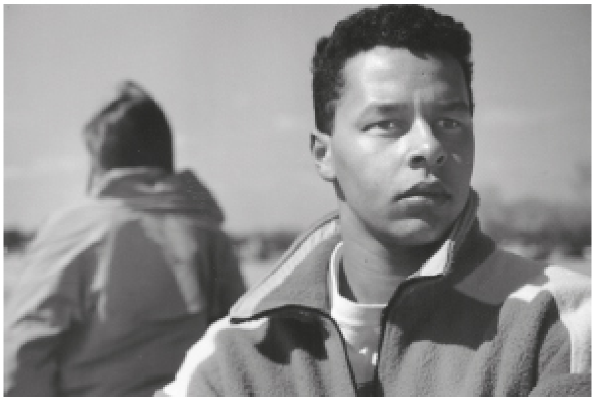
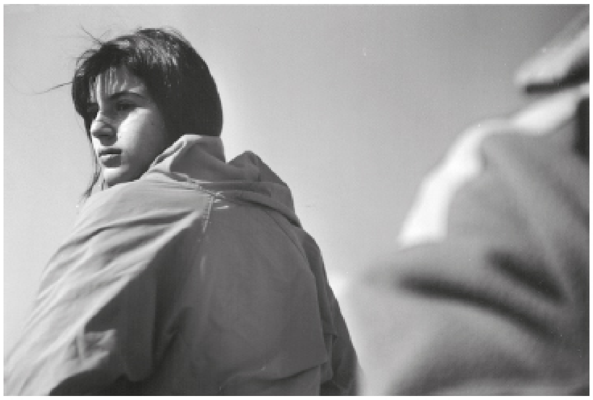


Personally, I find frames 5–10 to be the most successful framings of this position. All six frames are evocative because the head turn indicates that the featured player is listening to something offscreen. In a sense, this is an aural version of the cut on the look.

5



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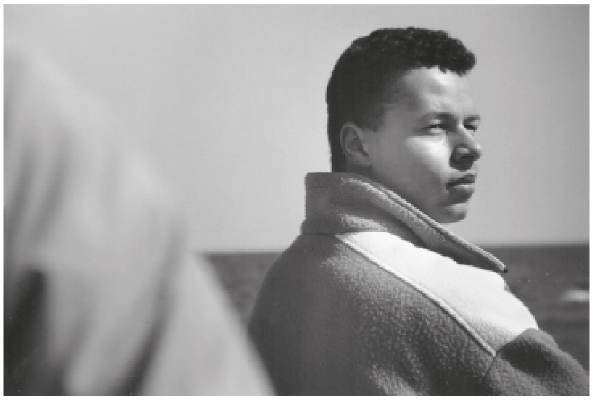

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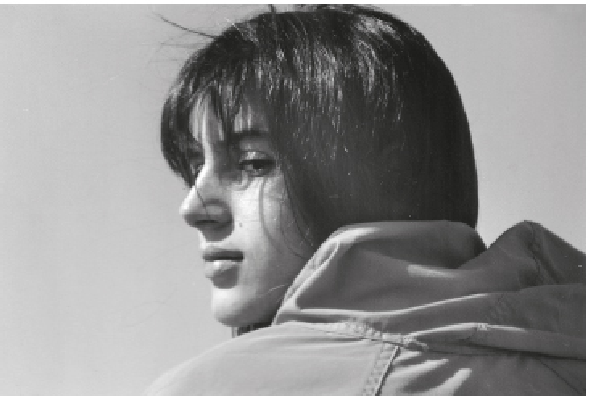

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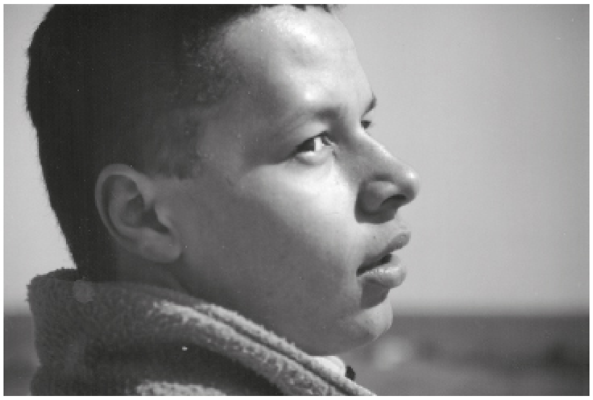

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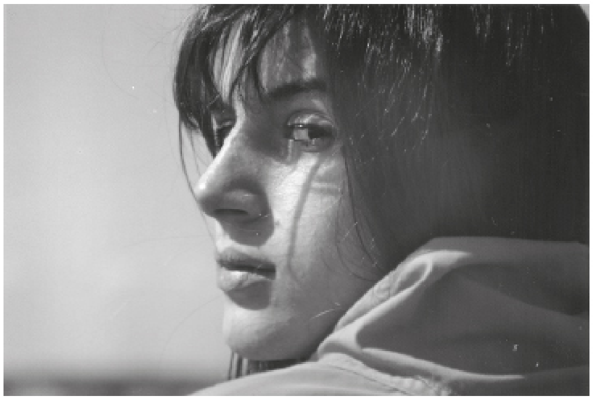

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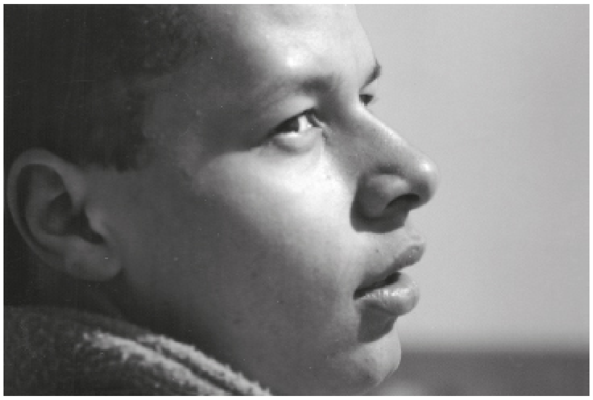

POSITION TEN

The following three sequences record a staging in which the players are positioned at different heights. This usually means that tight two-shots are framed as up or down angles, though in wide framings this is not necessary.

No reverse shots are shown in this series, though that is certainly a workable variation.

Spend some time looking at the shot flow in these sequences. Try “reading” the frames from right to left or diagonally to produce different combinations. Any of these shots works with any other, but each presents a slightly different feeling and spatial sense. Developing the skill to predict relationships between shots in a sequence will help you in composing individual shots.

There are innumerable variations on two-player stagings that we have not looked at, but nearly all the possibilities will share the essential physical and emotional qualities of at least one of the positions illustrated. The point is not to memorize every conceivable arrangement of player and camera, but rather to sharpen your awareness of the relationship of the elements from which the dramatic qualities of a shot are composed.

1

2

3

4

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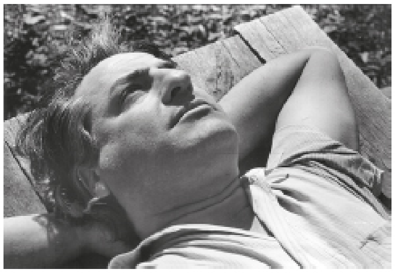

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10 Dialogue Staging With Three Subjects

Now that we have looked at the 10 positions for the “I” pattern, we can add a third player to our stagings, which will make the “A” and “L” patterns possible. Remember, our system is based on three assumptions:

- The I pattern is the simplest building block. It is found in the A and L patterns.
- Patterns determine camera placement based on the line of action.
- Position determines the placement of players in the frame based on the basic staging pattern.

The Difference Between A and L Patterns

Because actors are not always arranged in precise A or L alignment, it is not always easy to decide which pattern to apply. In this case, camera placement is the determining factor.

For example, when lining up players for a three-shot you may find that two players are facing the third player. If the third player is framed between the other two, then the staging arrangement is the A pattern. If the third player is lined up outside the other two players, then the arrangement is the L pattern. This aspect of staging is called *opposition*. Figure 10.1 shows the various types of oppositions that can be obtained.

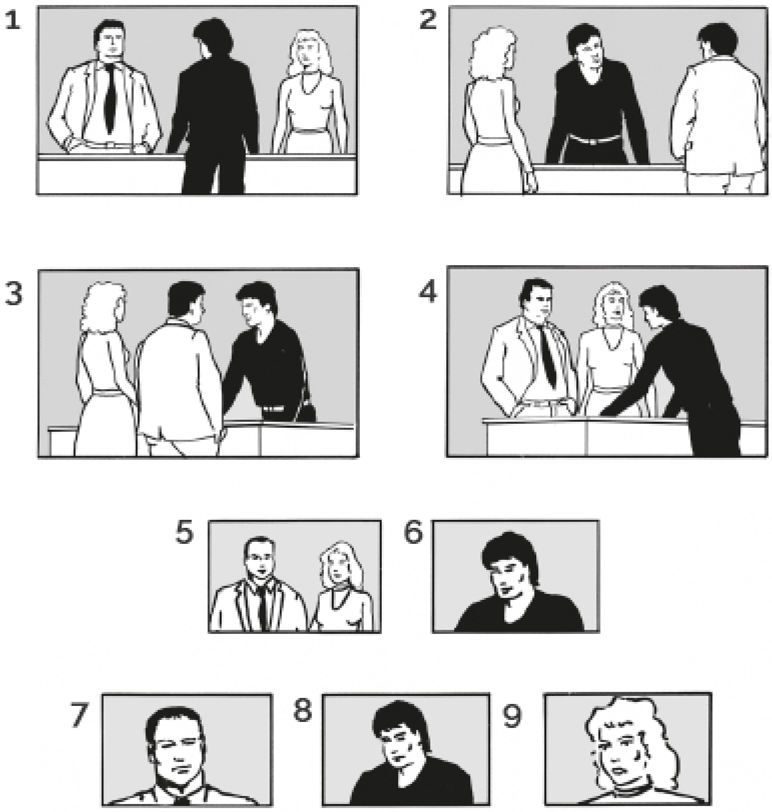


Figure 10.1: Frames 1 and 2 show one subject opposed by two others. Since the lone figure in black is flanked by the other two, this is an A pattern. Frames 3 and 4 show the alternative setup for the three-shot in which the lone subject is isolated to one side. This is an L pattern. Frames 5 and 6 illustrate the type of opposition that can be obtained if we break down the three-shot into a two-shot opposed by a close-up. In frames 7–9 all the players are equally opposed in close-ups.

The Basic Patterns and Positions

In the two-player stagings of the previous chapter, the models in the photoboards were arranged in open space. Having established the basic positions in those examples, we can look at stagings that are less precisely aligned.

By adding the additional player, we have increased the number of pattern and position combinations enormously. We do not need to look at all of them since we know that any combination can be reduced to the 10 positions in the I pattern that we have already seen. Conversely, we can reverse the process and construct dozens of three-player stagings from the 10 positions. This idea is shown in Figure 10.2.

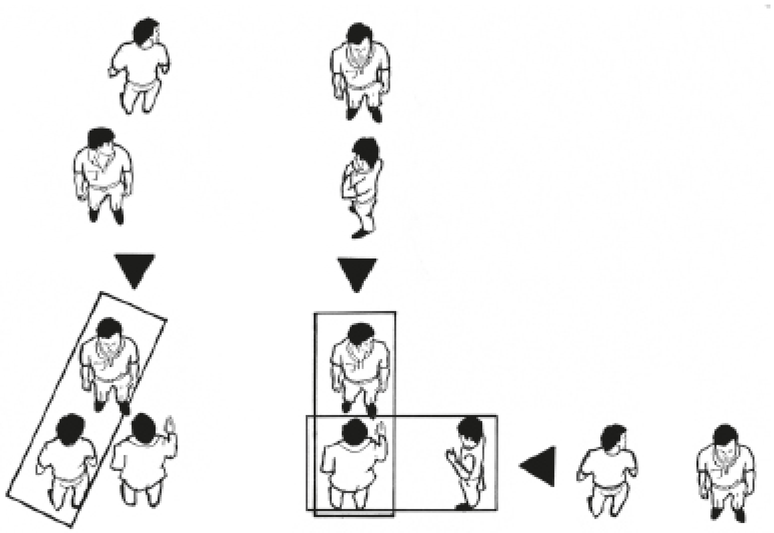


Figure 10.2: Here we see the boxed portion of the A and L patterns being replaced by the two alternate positions in the I pattern at the top of the figure. The box could just as easily be drawn horizontally or diagonally as long as two players are enclosed in the box.

Before looking at the photoboard examples, we can review the line of action as it pertains to three-player scenes. Figure 10.3 shows a typical staging situation in the A pattern.

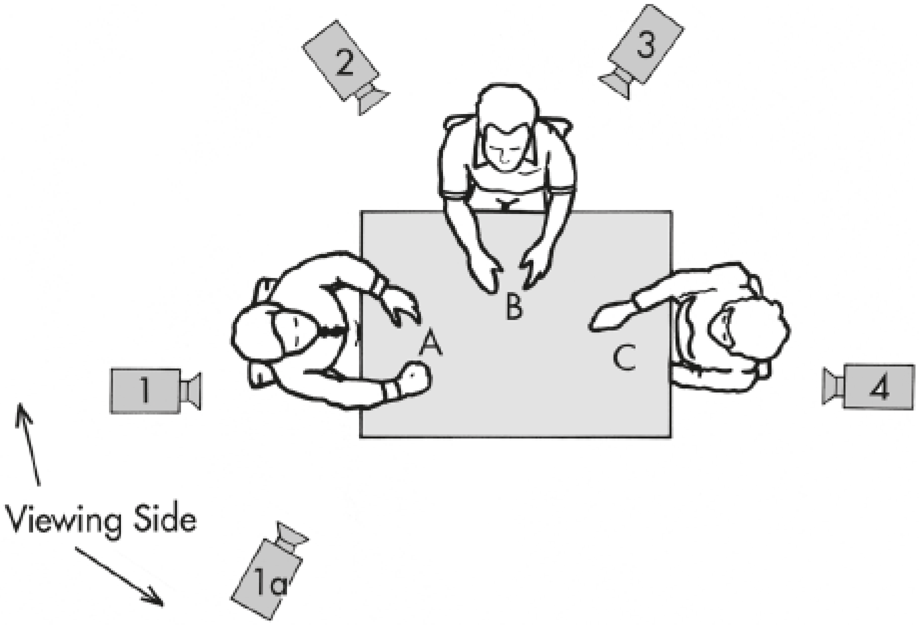


Figure 10.3: In this A pattern staging, I first determined the general angle of view. Although the camera can move 360 degrees around the players, the scene should have a basic viewing orientation. The circumstances vary with the scene, but in this case, the scene opens with a view from camera 1. The dialogue begins between players a and c. This establishes the line between them. Camera positions 1 and 2 for OTS shots are placed *outside* the line.

Now player b speaks to player c, establishing a new line between them. On what side of the line do we place the camera? This is where the general view comes in. Rather than set up a new camera position *outside* of players a and b, as we did for players a and c, we stay on the same side of player a. Now when player b speaks to player c we stay on the same side of player b and use camera position 2. What about camera position 3? Do we actually need this angle? With the number of angles we already have, it may be unnecessary. This example can be handled in other ways, but the general idea is to reuse positions when possible rather than constantly creating new ones whenever a new line is established.

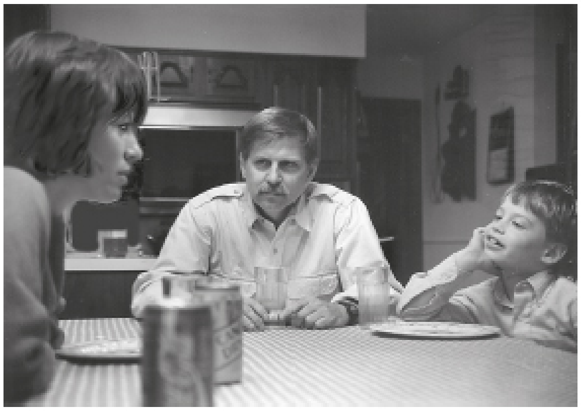
In the following examples, we will consider some common and some not-so-common staging situations with three players.

A Pattern (Version One)

Here is the same staging situation we just looked at in Figure 10.3. Frame 1 is the only combination of setup and staging for this pattern that permits us to see all the subjects clearly. This makes it the obvious choice for a master shot.

In the first series of frames (2–5), single shots (medium shots and a close-up) are used after the opening master shot. This produces two results. First, it tends to fragment space, and secondly, it prevents us from seeing the player speaking and the players who are listening in one shot. Compare this with the next sequence.

1



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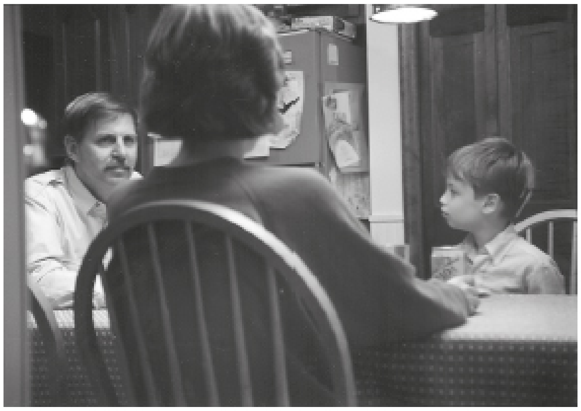

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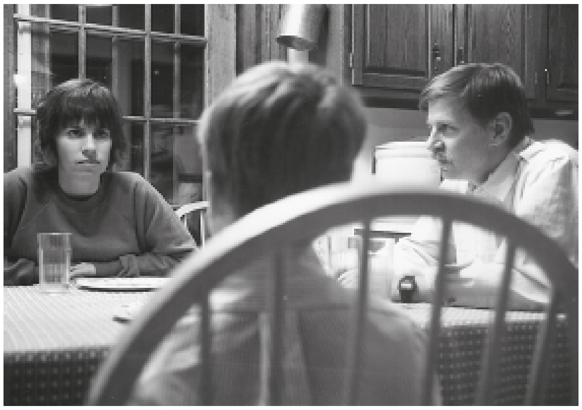
In this next series of six frames (6–11), OTS shots have been used to unify space. After the establishing shot, an entire conversation can be comfortably handled in OTS shots and an occasional three-shot or two-shot to vary the rhythm. As you can see, the OTS shots are framed in the same way we would handle the staging if there were only two players. The several OTS variations in the I pattern introduced in the last chapter all apply to the staging we are looking at here.

6



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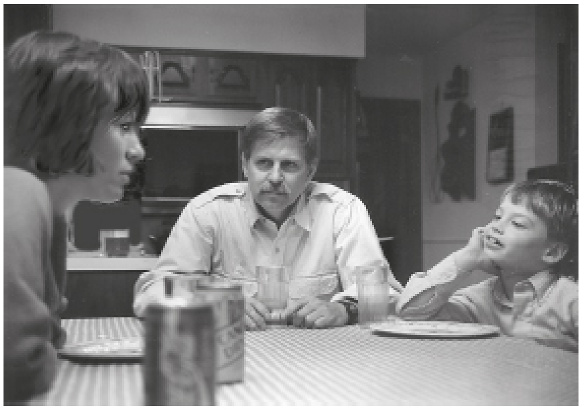

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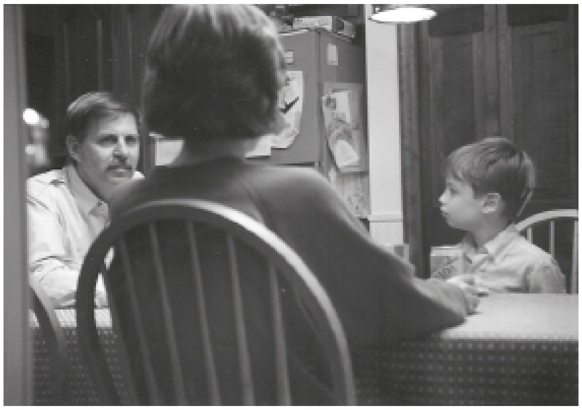

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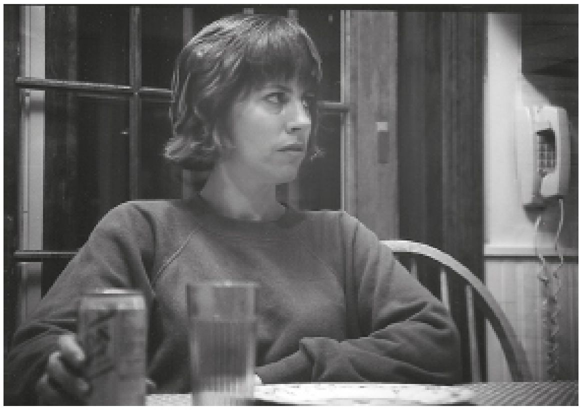

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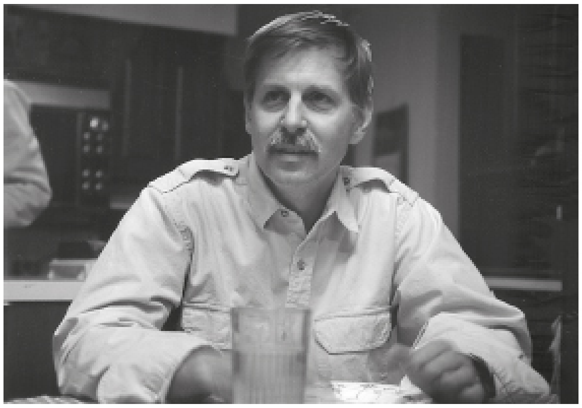
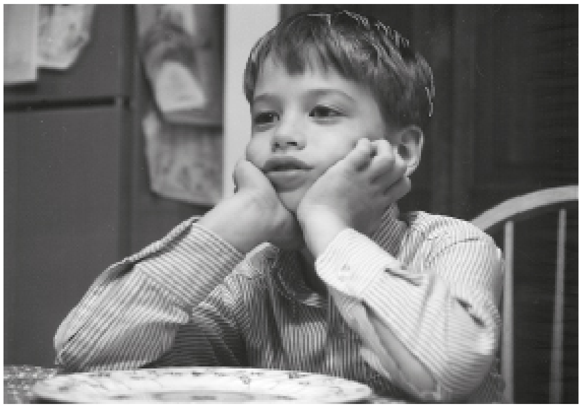
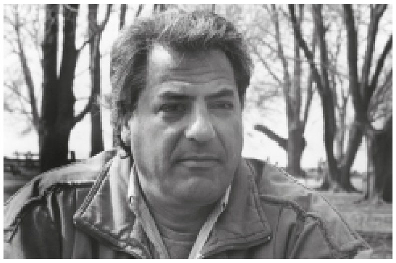


11



A Pattern (Version Two)

This “A” pattern staging is a direct positioning of opposed figures as might be expected in an interview or meeting in which the parties are on a formal basis. Again, this is a very common staging position whether the players are standing or sitting. Notice that the man’s sight line in frame 1 is very close to the camera, placing him in a direct relationship with the viewer. In frame 2, we see the women in profile, and their relationship to the viewer is deferential. It looks as though the women are the listeners and the man is in a position of authority. Frame 3 preserves this relationship even though we do not see the man’s face. This is because a down shot of this type is not the type of framing we would expect if either woman had anything important to say.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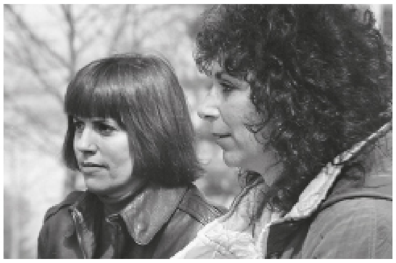
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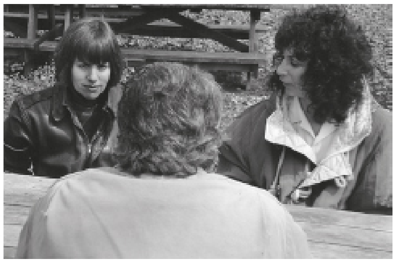
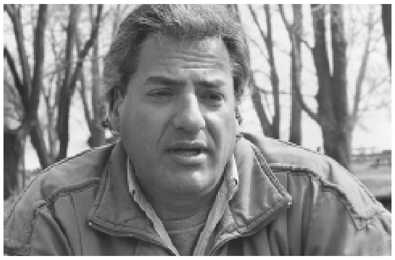

3

Compare frames 4–6 with the last series. Frame 4 places the man in a very direct relationship with the viewer. Personally, I do not like the rendition of space in frames 4 and 5. Frame 5 was shot with a 40 mm lens, but it looks too wide to me. What do you think about frame 6? Now look at both sequences and compare the experience of “reading” them. Which sequence do you find the most successful in terms of shot flow? If you could substitute shots from one sequence for some in the other, which ones would you choose?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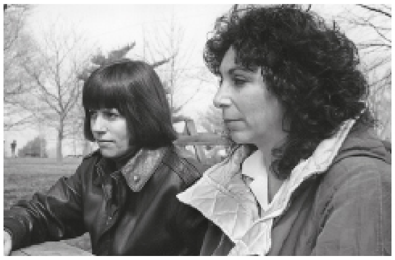
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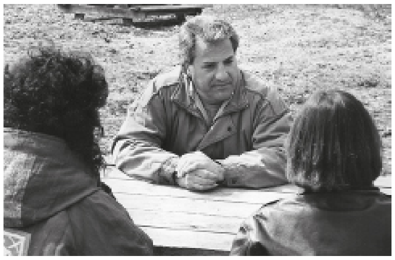
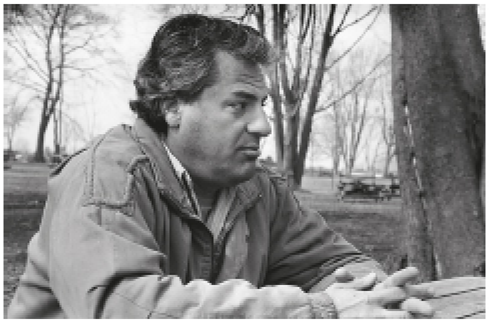

6

In this next series, you can see how the man's presence is diminished when he is not in a frontal position. Before he was in command; now he is in a reactive position. If we started with a picture of the woman facing the camera followed by the profile shot of the man in frame 7, the woman would be in the position of authority.

7



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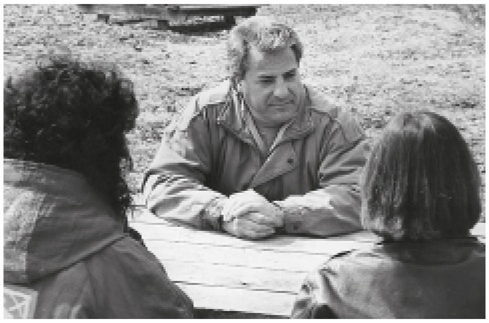


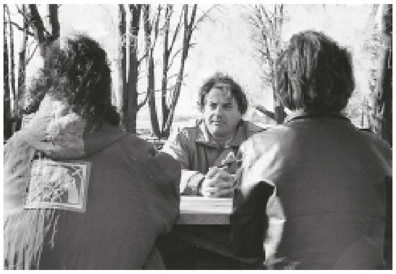
A Pattern (Version Two)

The two series of frames below are a good comparison of overlapped space and discontinuous space within a frame. Frame 10 in the top row is an OTS shot and includes some of the man from the previous shot. This is what is meant by *overlapping* space. The reverse CU shot in frame 11 does not include space from the previous shot and is therefore *discontinuous*. Overlapping ties together the scene space. At the same time, close-ups like the ones in frames 12 and 14 isolate a subject in a way that might be justified dramatically.

Notice how frames 11 and 13 serve as pivot shots directing our attention to the appropriate CU, frame 12 or 14. The direction of the man's look is the determining factor. Cutting on his head turn is a powerful editing cue.

One last point to be made is the importance of lens choice. These shots were all photographed in the 50 to 90 mm range. The three shots, frames 9 and 13, were the widest at 50 mm, and it might have been possible to bring the women in the foreground into a closer relationship with the man with a longer lens. Manipulating scene space with the lens is a powerful technique, but if used carelessly it can cause spatial inconsistencies.

9



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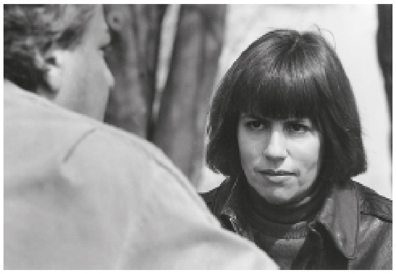

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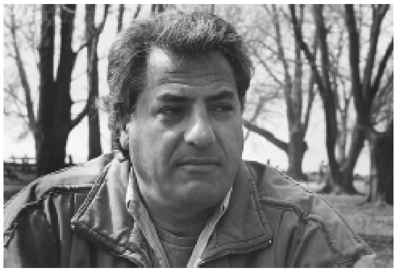

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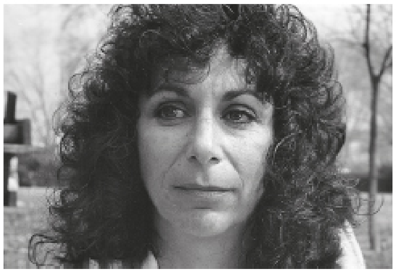

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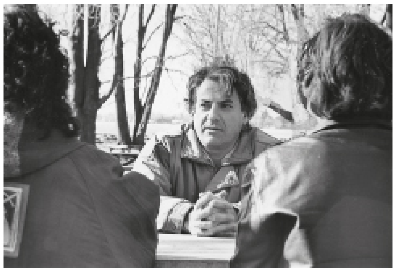
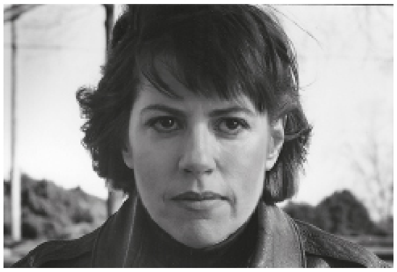


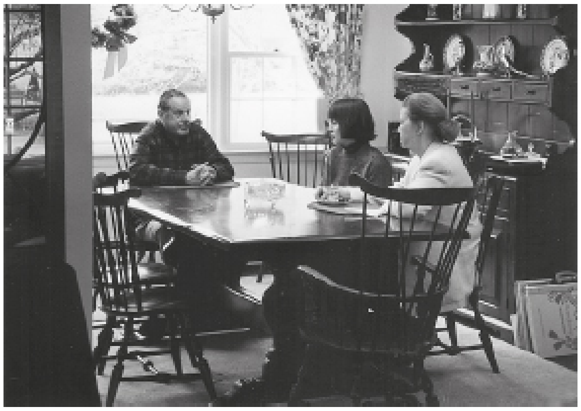
14



L Pattern (Version One)

Here we see a typical use of the L pattern. An angular view in frame 1 moves to a low-angle OTS shot in frame 2. Actually, we are seeing a portion of the man's arm, not his shoulder, and it preserves the spatial unity of the opening shot. We then move to two close-ups. Notice the rhythm created in four frames by the change in shot size and camera angle. We become progressively tighter for three frames and then back out to a slightly wider CU in frame 4. Compare this with the next series.

1



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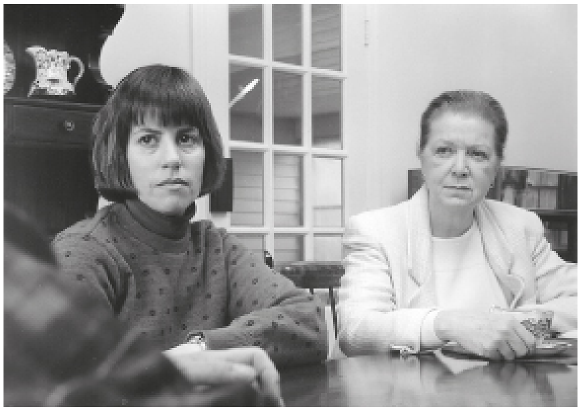

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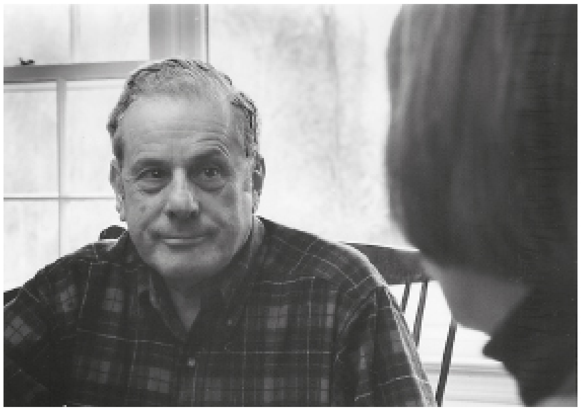

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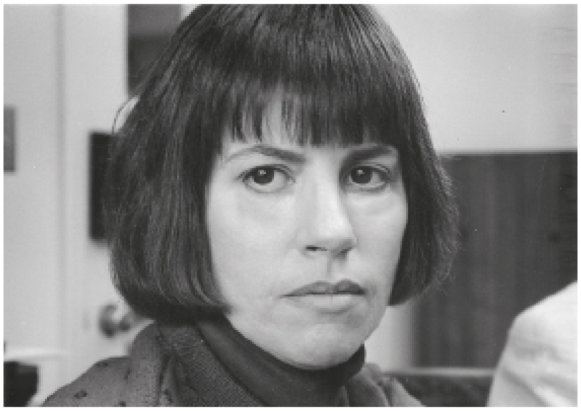
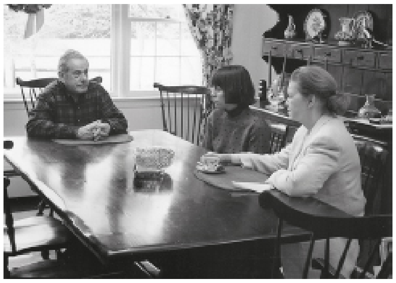


Frame 5–7 show how the sequence would look if we only used OTS three-shots. An entire conversation could be shot this way, though frame 6 could be a little tighter. Generally speaking, this sequence has a more relaxed, stable feel than the previous version.

5



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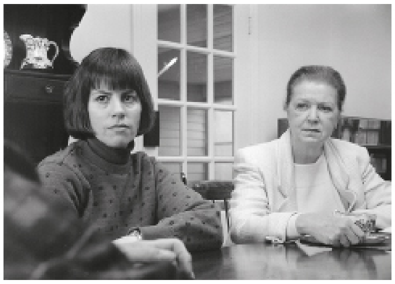

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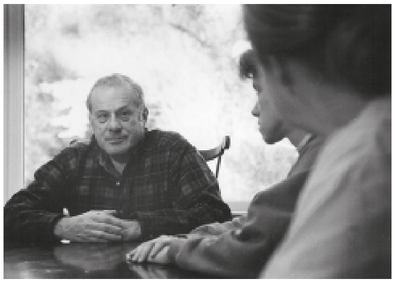
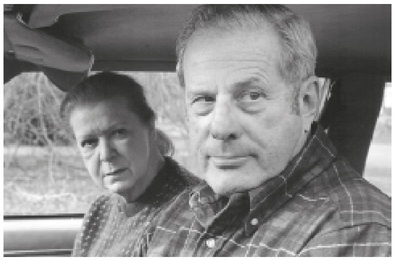


L Pattern (Version Two)

Here's another version of the L pattern. This time the opening shot of the scene is a two-shot. Not until frame 3 do we see an overview of the scene space. This is an interesting strategy for opening a scene — deliberately withholding the full context of the scene. We also see a typical use of the two-shot in frame 1. It is typical because the L pattern generally groups the two players on the long top of the L together. Almost always, the L seating or standing arrangement occurs when a single player is addressing two others.

1



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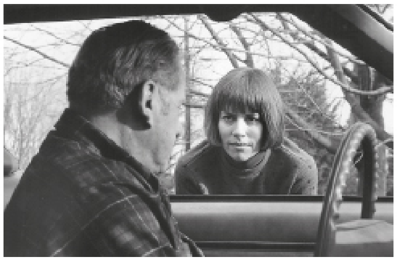

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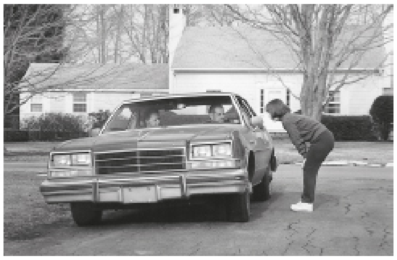
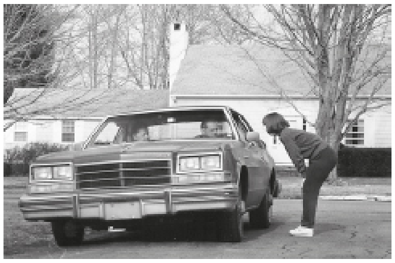


We can compare the use of the three-shot in this last series with the two-shot in the previous series. Both three-shots are OTS framings. An alternative three-shot is shown in the bottom row. One last point: The frames in all these series are necessarily small for presentation purposes. In a theater, the subjects in these shots would appear considerably closer and more intimate.

4



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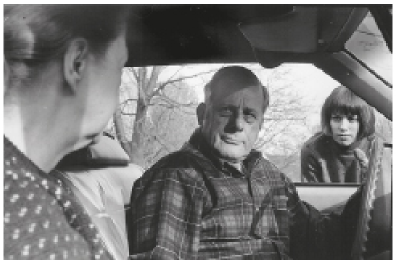

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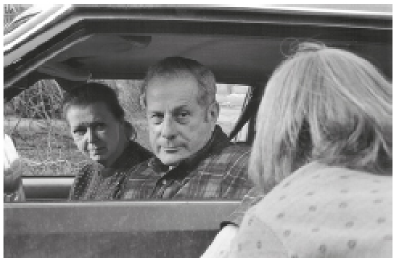

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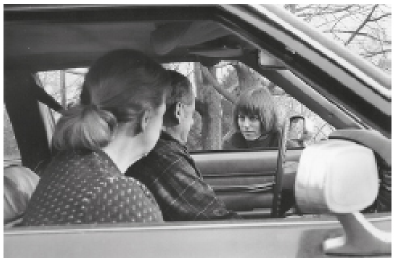

I Pattern

This is a simple version of a common staging. Once again, we can see that the options for cutting tend toward shot, reverse shot patterns. If cutting is not used, we can employ more complex staging in depth, but quite often OTS shots, two-shots, and close-ups are the best way to frame the action. In this series, we find this strategy working effectively. By adding a dolly move and by repositioning the players, we have obtained many of the same angles seen in multiple shots using only the master shot. Later we'll look at staging techniques that use a master shot for an entire scene.

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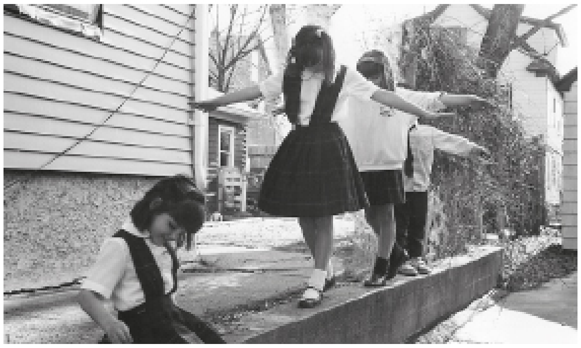

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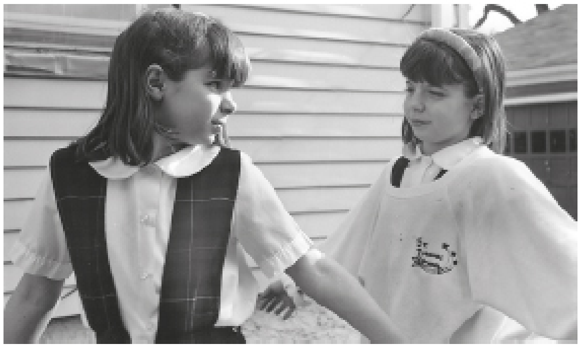

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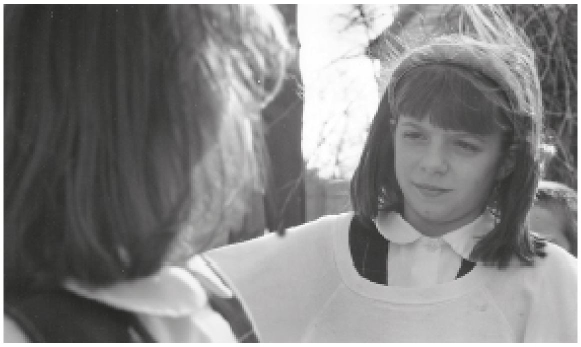

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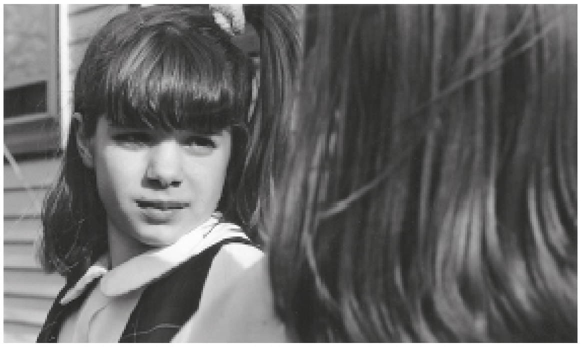

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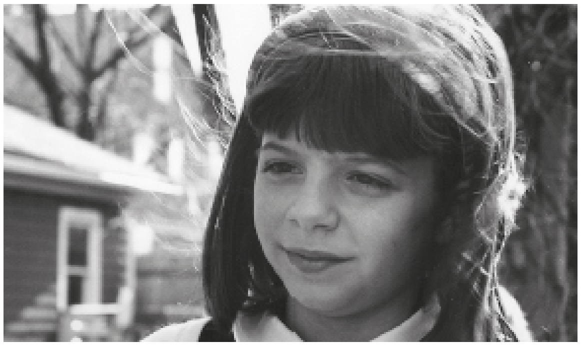

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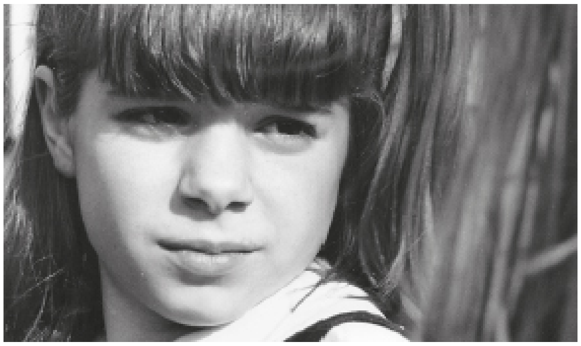
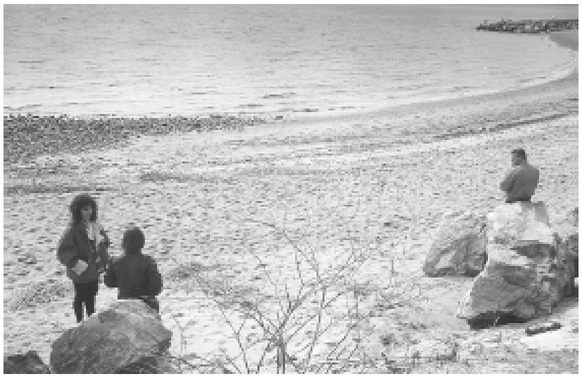


A Pattern (In-Depth Staging One)

This next series is an unusual staging of a dialogue sequence. I have included it as a study of in-depth staging and the use of lenses.

Frames 1–4 are straightforward stagings of the players. A line of action is established between the man and the two women. Respecting the line we can move to the low-angle two-shot (frame 3) or the subsequent OTS shots of the women (frame 4), which establish a new line.

1



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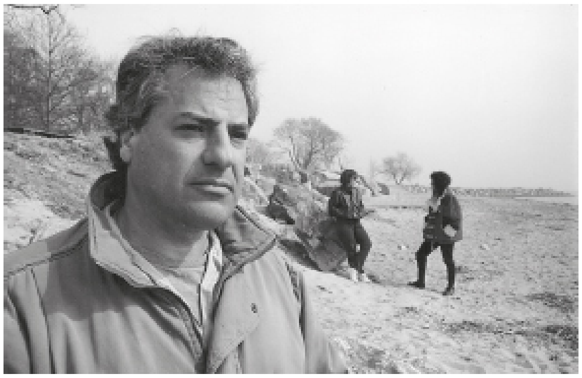

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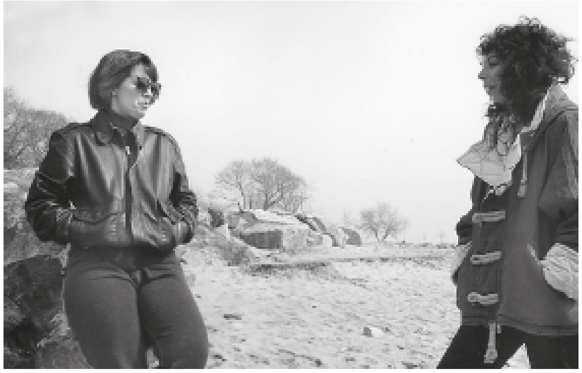

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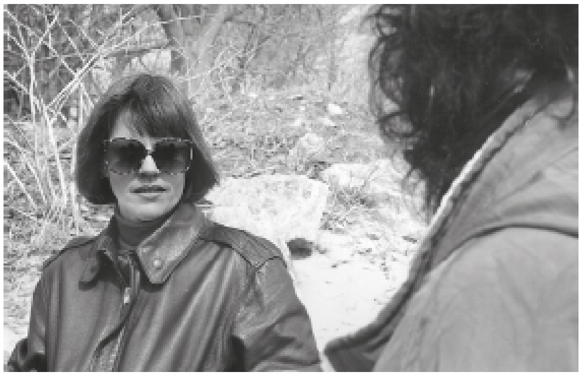
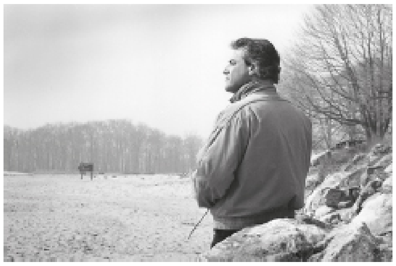


If we want to explore more fully the relationship between the man and the women, we can use a pair of reverse shots. Here's how we might cross the line: We could open the scene with a medium shot of the man in frame 5. This could be followed by the man's head turn as he looks at the women in the foreground in frame 6. After several seconds, the man will turn away, and we can cut to frame 7. Now we can cut to the two-shots or the OTS shots from the previous series. We also have the option of cutting to OTS shots on the *opposite* side of the women after frame 7.

5



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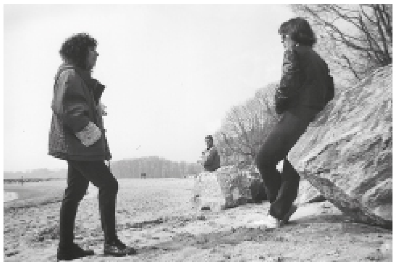

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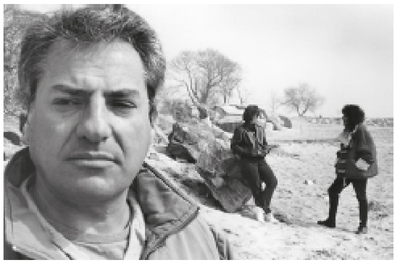
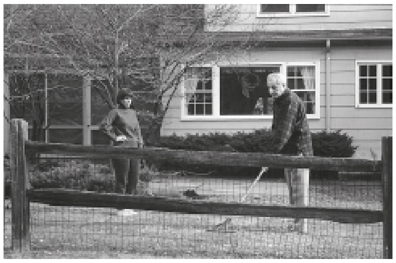


A Pattern (In-Depth Staging Two)

This staging in depth is a good example of the use of frontality. It has been designed to work without reverses or shots taken from the side. The camera is able to move all the way to the background to feature the women coming through the gate. After the establishing shot, a scene staged this way might only use frames 2 and 3 for an entire conversation.

1



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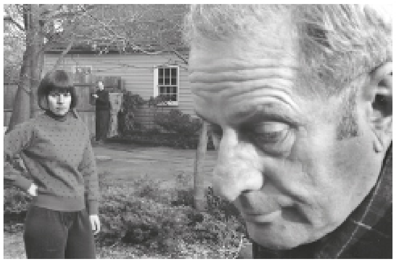

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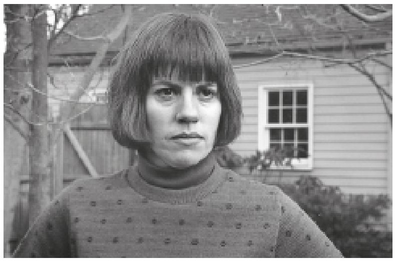
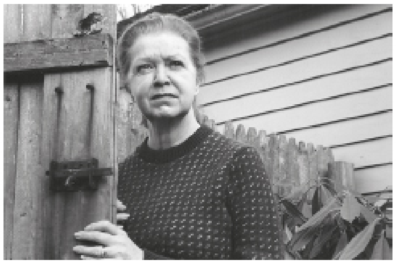


Frames 4–6 represent an alternative establishment of scene space. In this version, the scene opens with the woman in the background. We are intrigued by her look, and cut to the wider frame of the other two players in frame 5. This is a cut on the look, but it is not a POV shot. That would require a reverse angle. Finally, we widen all the way out in a wide establishing shot. This might serve as a dramatic pause in the middle of the scene or as the final shot.

4



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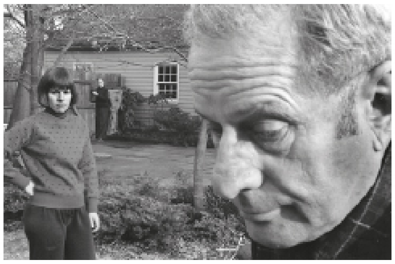

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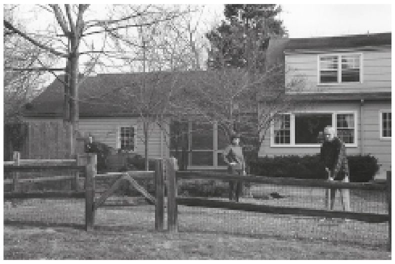

A Pattern (Experimenting With the Line of Action)

This A arrangement stages the players at different heights to obtain interesting angles. This is also an example of the unorthodox use of the line of action. Frames 1 and 2 establish the line in an unconventional manner by not basing it on the sight lines of the players. Frame 3 is a radical shift to a low-angle shot. But the scene geography was so clear in frame 1 that we remember where the boy on the railing was seated. Also, the gunstock was deliberately included in the shot as a spatial signpost.

Frame 4 observes the new line established between the two boys on the railing, but in frame 5, we violate that line to get the shot of the boy standing on the ground. Frame 6 is a reestablishing shot and frame 7 again crosses the line. It is likely that an actual sequence would use head turns and other spatial cues that would make the editing pattern more cohesive. However, whether or not this rule-breaking approach works for you is your decision.

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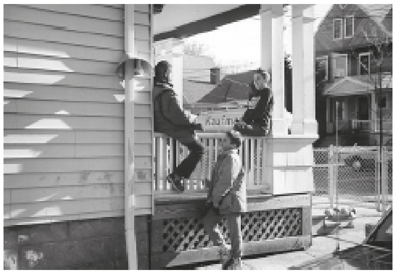

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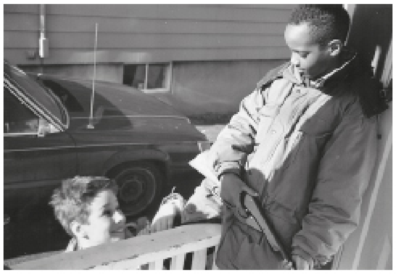

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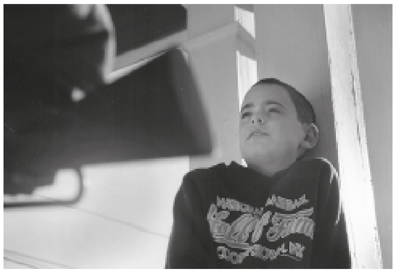

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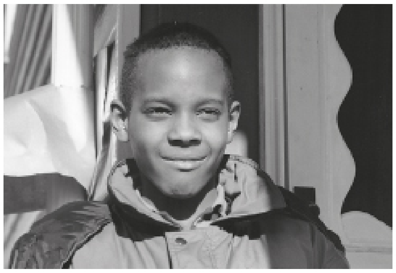

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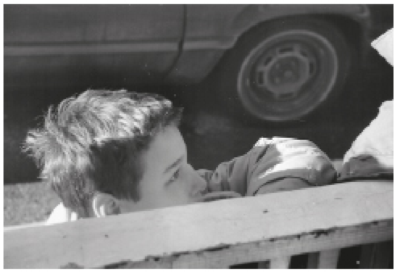

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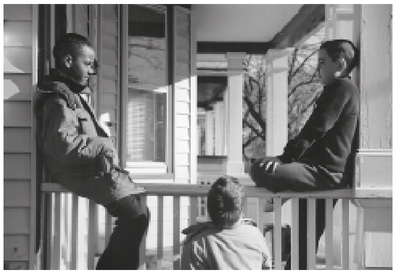

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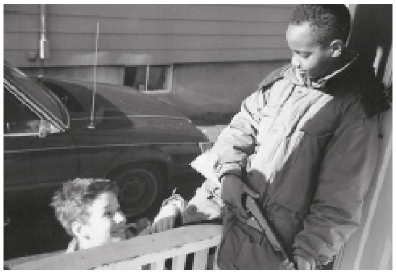

L Pattern (Version Three)

Here's an alternative treatment of the previous scene. In this version, the cut on the look motivates many of the shots. We open with the three-shot in frame 1 (the third boy is hidden behind the railing). In frame 2, we cut to a reverse on the boy's head turn and look. We reverse again and move to the CU of the boy behind the railing looking back. In frame 4, the boy seated on the railing throws a pebble at the boy behind the railing, who looks up in frame 5. We open up to a wide shot in frame 6 as the boy in the foreground calls to his two friends. This motivates the head turn of the boy in CU in frame 7. Throughout this sequence cutting has been motivated by either action or the cut on the look.

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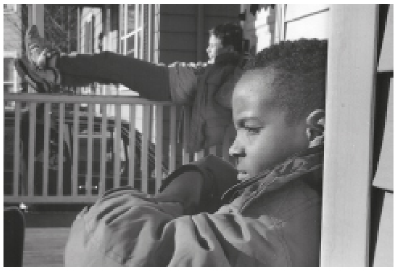

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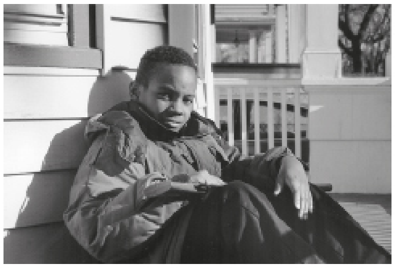

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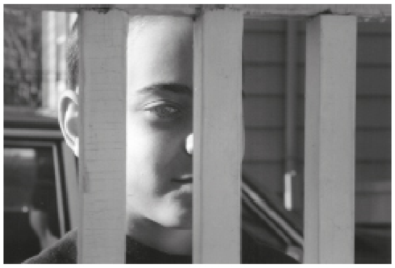

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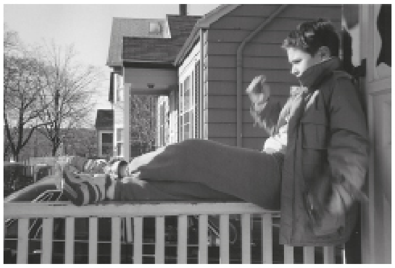

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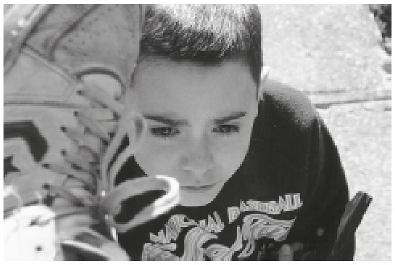

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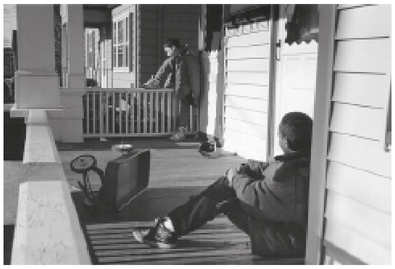

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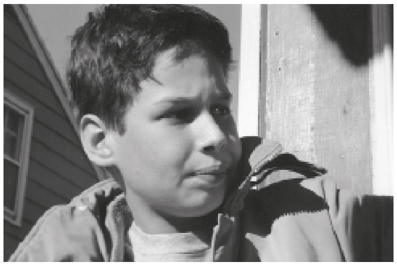

11 Four or More Player Dialogue Stagings

Staging dialogue scenes with four or more subjects utilizes the same A, I, and L patterns that we used for three-player dialogue scenes. However, as the number of subjects grows, so do the possibilities for individual shots or group shots. For instance, for a scene with five subjects, there are 5 possible CUs, 9 two-shots, 6 three-shots, 6 four-shots, and 1 five-person master shot, or approximately 27 shots. Obviously, this is an overwhelming number of choices for any scene, and while some setups are clearly impractical, photographing groupings with more than three subjects is a matter of consolidation and simplification.

In nearly all cases, dramatic structure in fiction does this for us by representing a generalized view of the human situation through the actions of individuals. In practical terms, this is found in any scene involving large numbers of people when we focus on the key experiences of the main characters within a compressed time frame. While these are dramatic conventions, they are similar to how we experience any large gathering of people in real life. At a dinner party, for example, people arrange themselves into small groups because it’s simply too difficult to converse with more than five or six people simultaneously. Even when one person gains the attention of the other guests, it’s basically a two-person arrangement: the speaker and his audience. When filming a large group where several players speak, close-ups are often used in favor of three and four-player group shots, since this helps differentiate the players.

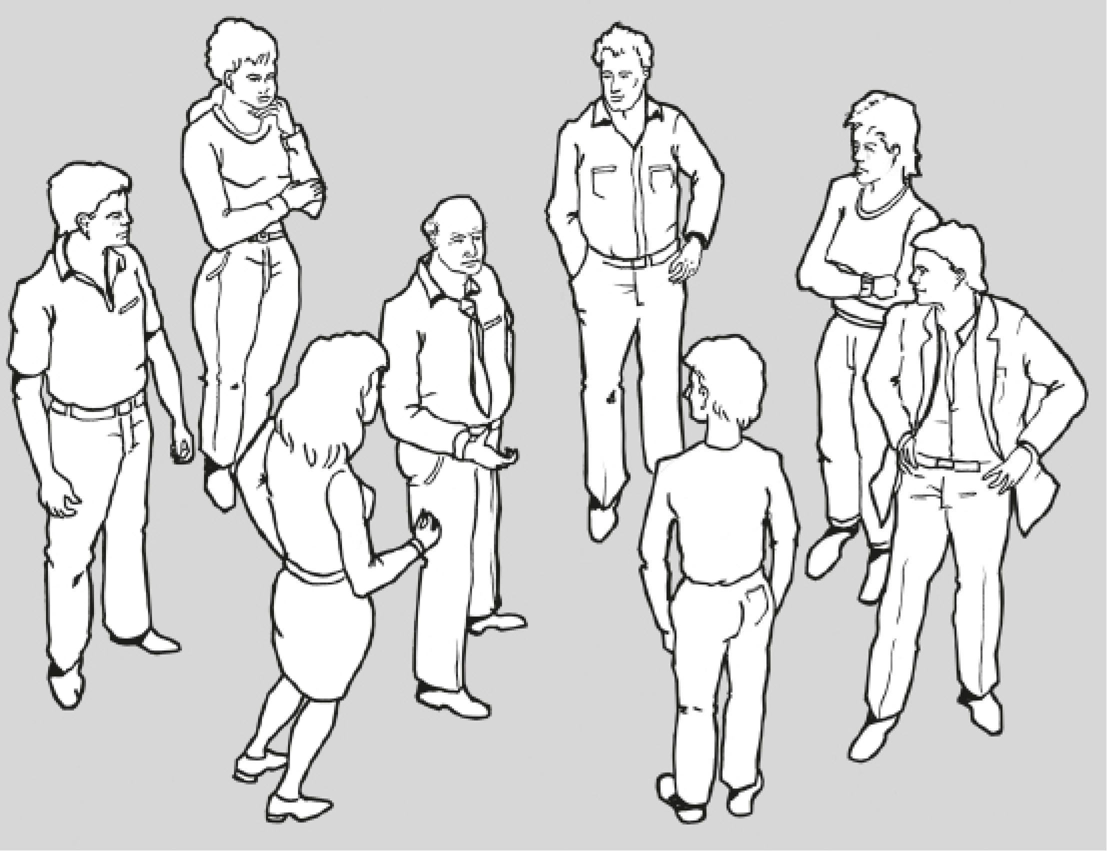

Figure 11.1

If we look at Figure 11.1, we see one man surrounded by seven other people. It would be unusual for each of these players to have significant speaking parts. Even if that were the case, one or two players would almost certainly emerge as the central players. The key to camera positioning is identifying which players are the central players in the scene.

Figure 11.2 shows the line of action established between the principal two players in the scene. CUs of all the other players might be used, but the basic staging preserves the line of action as established by these players.

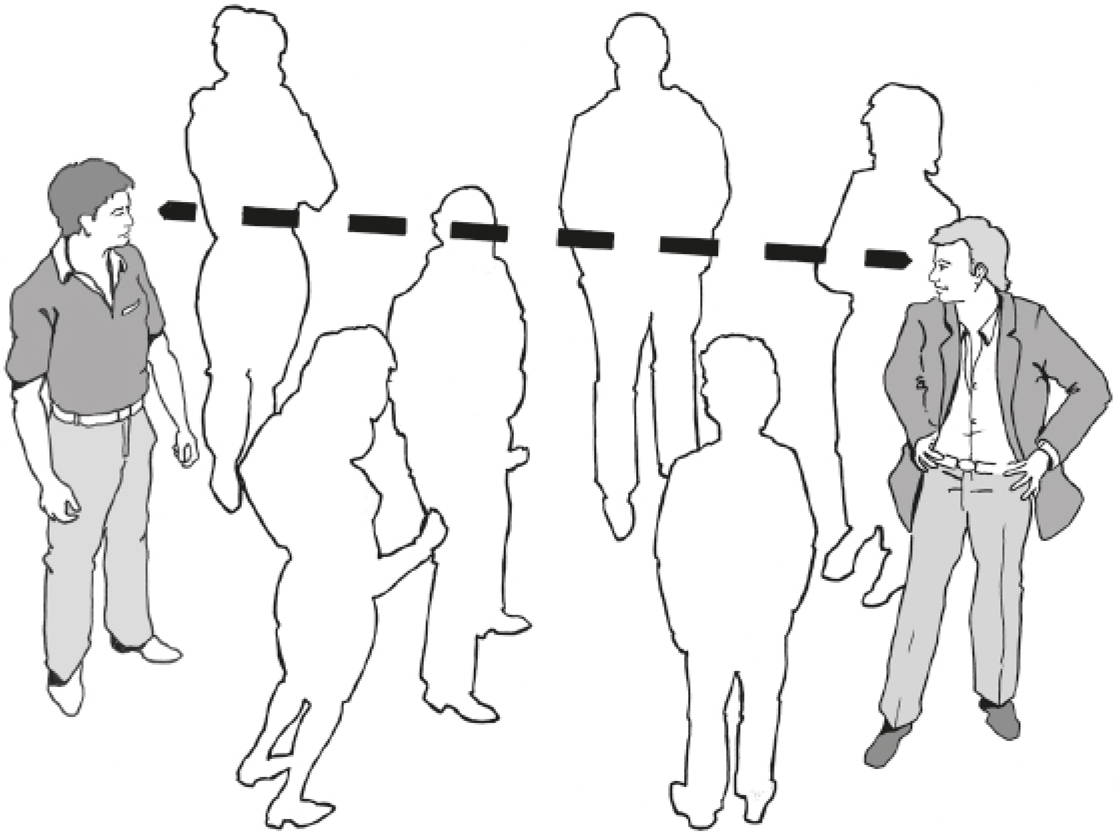

Figure 11.2

Figure 11.3 shows what happens if three players share the dialogue equally. In this case, the A pattern applies and the camera can be positioned accordingly. As we learned in the previous chapter, even the A pattern is ultimately reduced to the two-subject I position when determining the line of action. The players who do not have dialogue may be included in the shot, but the camera position is restricted to the 180-degree working area on one side of the line of action.

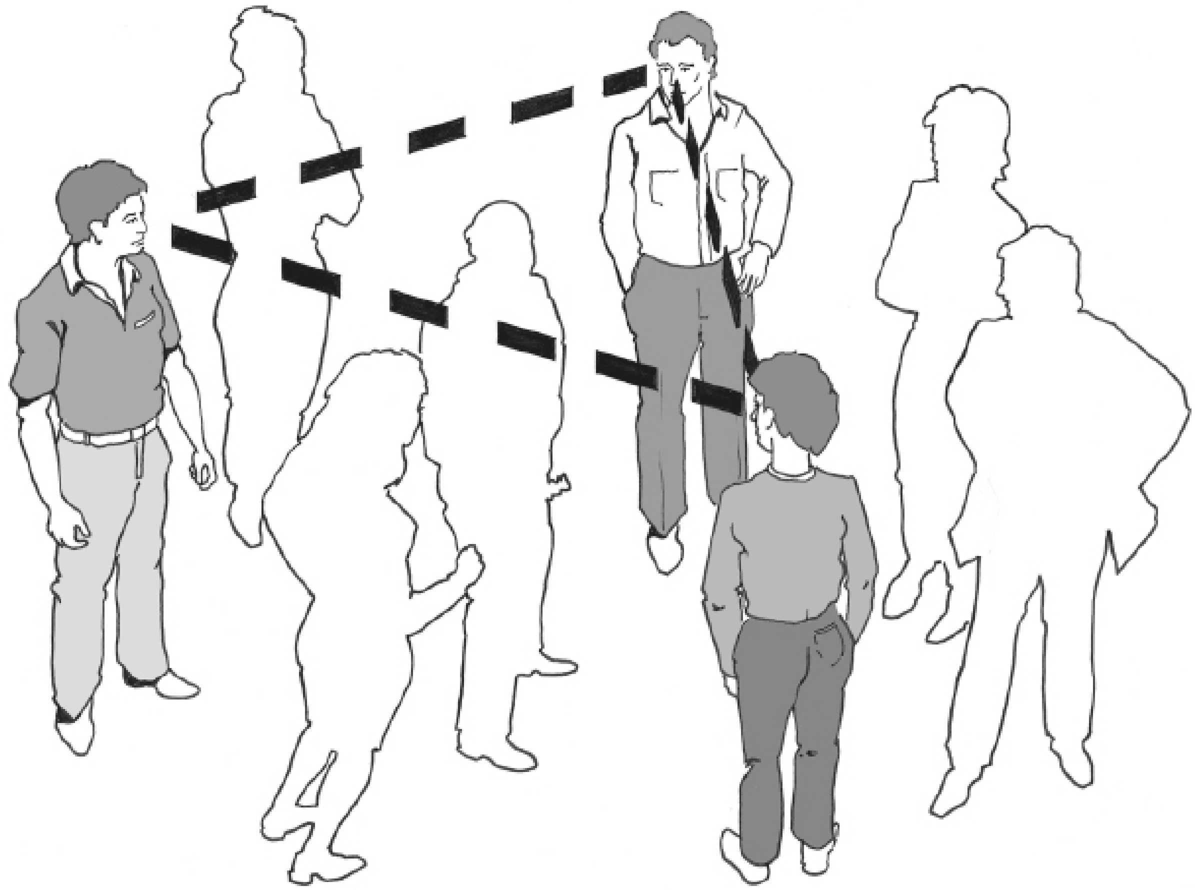

Figure 11.3

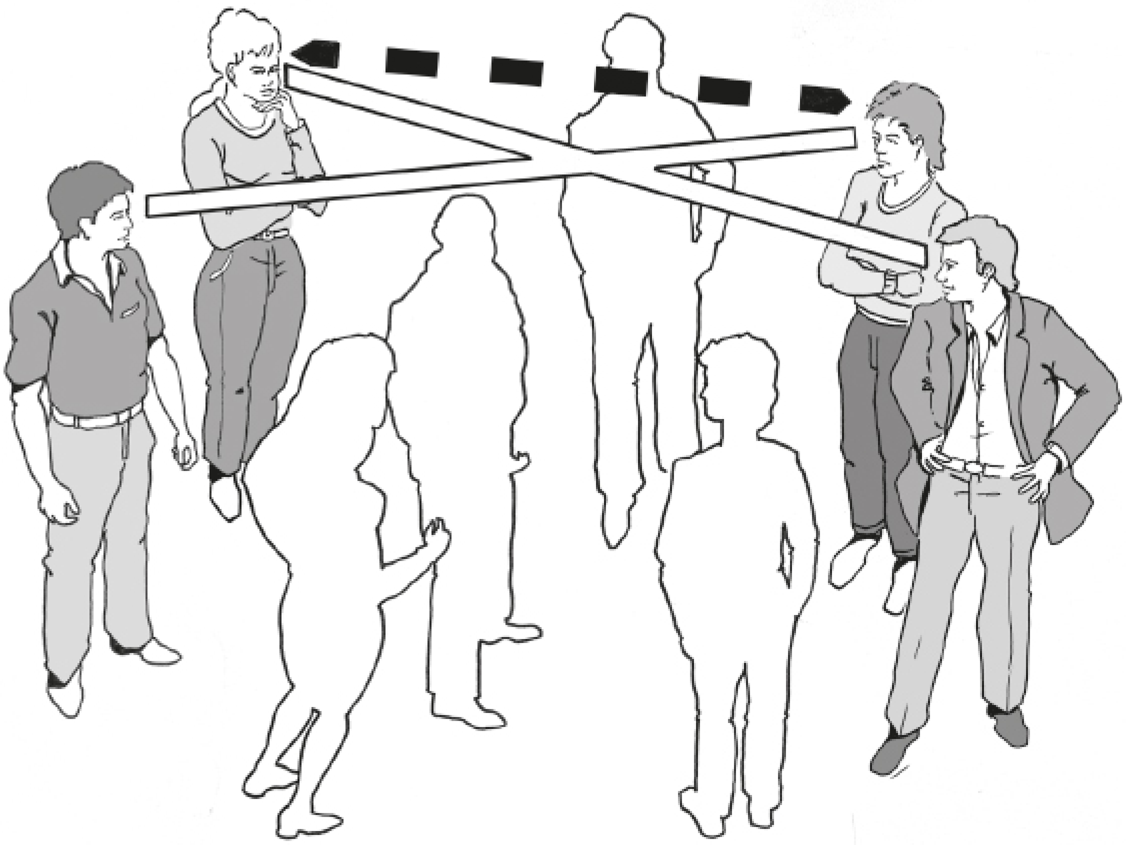

Figure 11.4

In Figure 11.4, the same logic applies to four key players. In this situation, we have multiple lines of sight or potential lines of action. While it is possible to puzzle out camera placement for each pair of players, there is a simpler way to work out the staging. Limit yourself to a few key setups. If you are establishing more than four sightlines to move around space in a large group, you are creating unnecessary problems. The dotted line in Figure 11.4 represents a basic line of action that permits close-ups, singles, two-shots, and a group shot. This means that we are establishing a general viewing direction.

It should be mentioned at this point that all this attention to the line of action and camera setup implies an active cutting style. In any of the previous examples of large group stagings, a single camera setup could be used, and this of course would eliminate continuity problems.

While it is easy to visualize this in illustrations from an uncluttered high-angle view, it can be anything but simple to visualize a scene when you're on the set with a large cast. But no matter how complex the staging becomes, the camera geography of any scene is easily determined by keeping the line of action in mind. This is true whether you choose to violate the line or not. The Japanese director Yasujiro Ozu, whose staging style required him to cross the line, was as consistent in his rejection of the traditional rules of continuity as any Hollywood director is in observing them. The purpose of describing staging in terms of the line of action is to help a director make clearheaded choices. The line and the patterns based on the line should be thought of as a system of organization, not as an aesthetic choice. If it helps you to break through to some new way of working, so much the better.

A Pattern (Version One)

This time 5 players are seated in a circular arrangement. In this case, it's possible to interpret the staging as an I, A, or L arrangement depending on which players are being emphasized. The determination of the line of action, general viewing angle, and staging pattern is your choice.

In this situation, the predominant viewing angle is over the shoulder of the grandmother shown in Figure 3. All the other players can be viewed from this position. Only one reverse is required to see the grandmother.

In this situation, the line of action is extremely flexible. The reason is that the line of action is generally determined by the sight line of the players featured in the scene. As you can see, there are so many possible sight lines in this circular staging that we could easily establish a new line anywhere in the scene space.

Frames 2, 3, and 4 show an editing pattern in which subjects on the sides of the table are seen in angular shots, essentially from the point of view of the grandmother in frame 3. An unorthodox alternative is the side-by-side OTS shots of the grandmother in frames 5 and 6.

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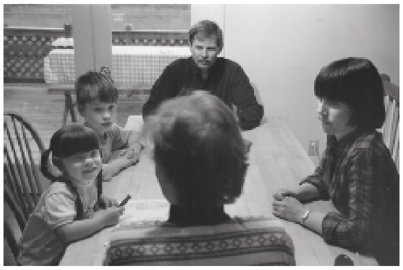

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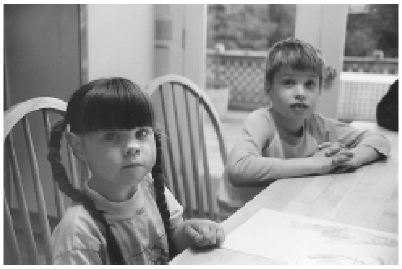

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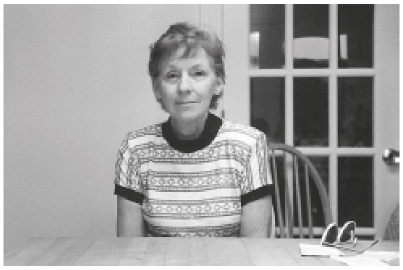

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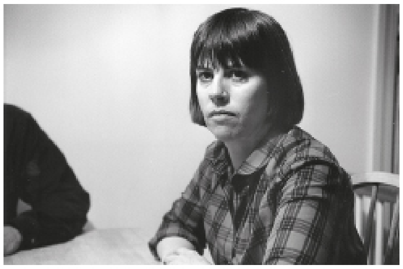

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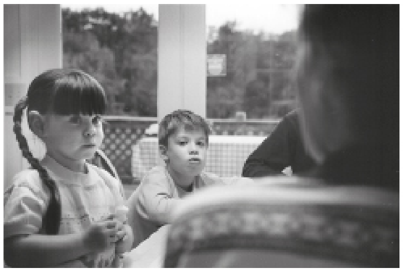

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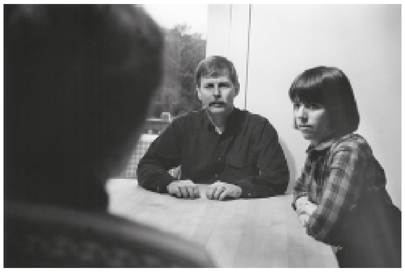


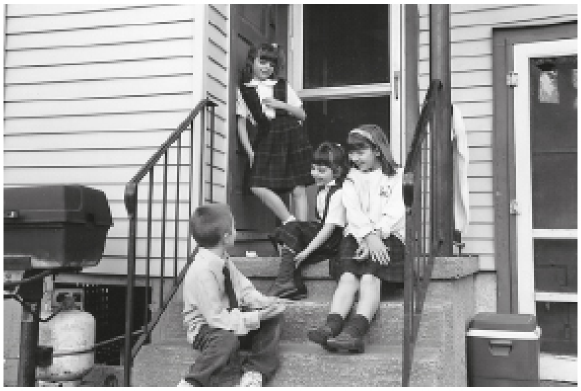
L Pattern

This is a good example of how a group of four players is treated in CUs, two-shots, and three-shots. In this arrangement the two girls seated side-by-side clearly work as a two-shot and form the center of the scene. We can frame them as though they were one player opposite the boy, which means we are essentially working with the I pattern.

In frame 1 we set up the full group and move into a wide OTS three-shot in frame 2 (the fourth figure is partially visible). The OTS two-shot in frame 3, the two-shot in frame 4, and the medium single shot in frame 5 make up one simplified treatment of the scene, assuming that editing is called for.

To show how easy it would be to stage the scene for a single master shot, consider frame 2. If the camera were shifted a few feet to the right and tilted up, all four figures would be framed. In this arrangement, the seated figures would be in profile and the standing figure would be in a frontal position.

1



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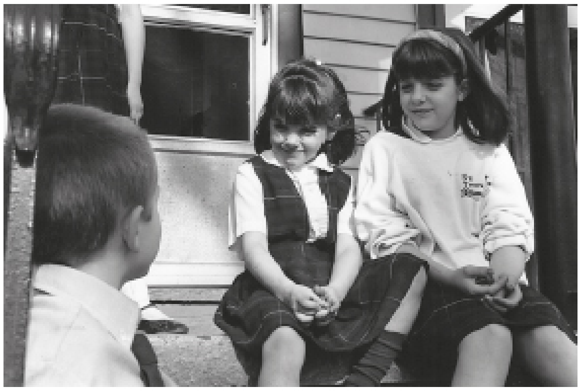

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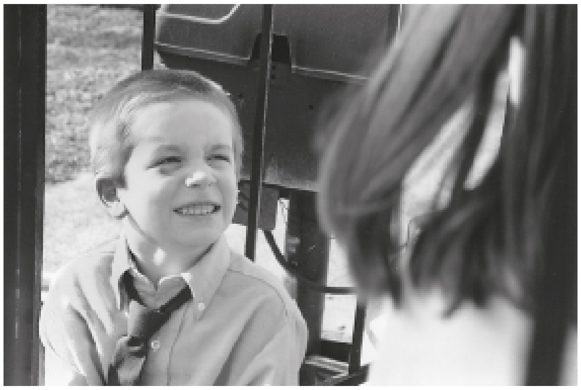


4

5

A Pattern (Version Two)

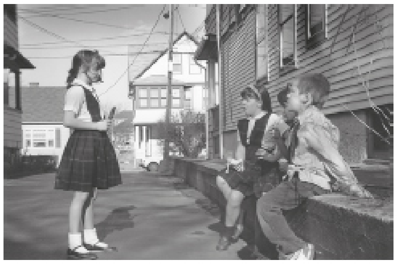
This next series of nine panels shows three staging possibilities comparing I, L, and A pattern stagings. In the first example we have a classic three-angle treatment of the I pattern. Panel 1 shows the head-on center position. From a closer position, but still located midpoint between the subjects, the camera is pivoted left and right to obtain panels 2 and 3.

In the second sequence, we open up with the girl who is standing lined up to one side of the seated figures. This makes it the L pattern. At the same time, the camera has been moved to a position almost along the line of action and outside the scene space. Two angular shots give us a single and a three-shot.

In this next sequence we have an A pattern interpretation of the same scene. In this case, the girl standing is lined up so that she is flanked by the subjects in frames 7 and 8. In these two shots, the line of action practically runs through the camera position.

Patterns can also be mixed. If you read the frames vertically, for instance, panels 1, 4, and 7 and shots from the I, L, and A patterns work together quite comfortably. The choice is essentially between symmetrical or asymmetrical framings. This is most obvious in the shot, reverse shot pattern.

1



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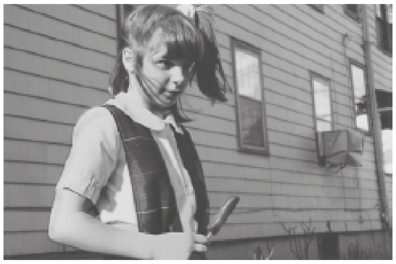

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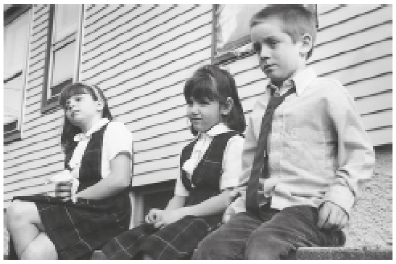

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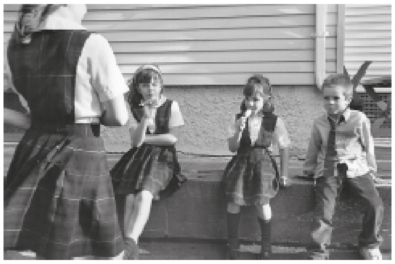

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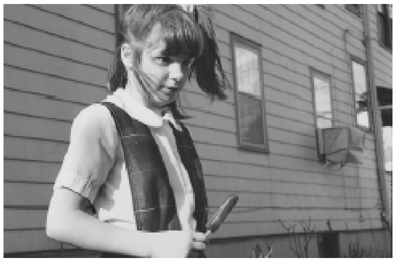

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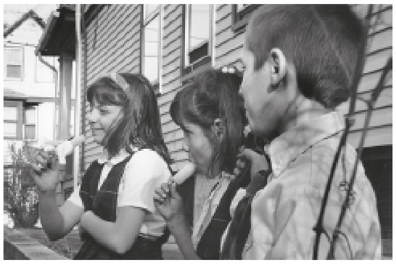

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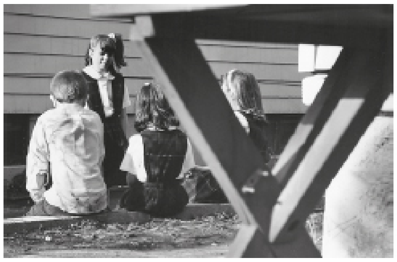

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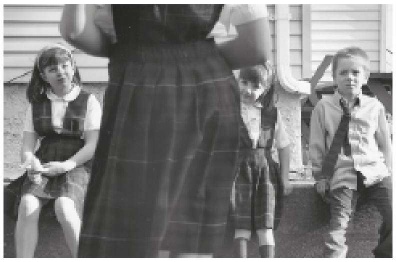

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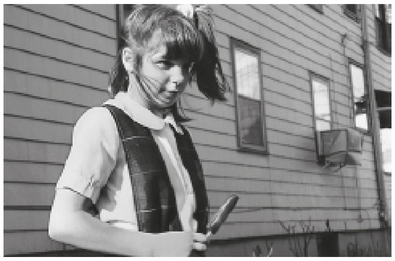
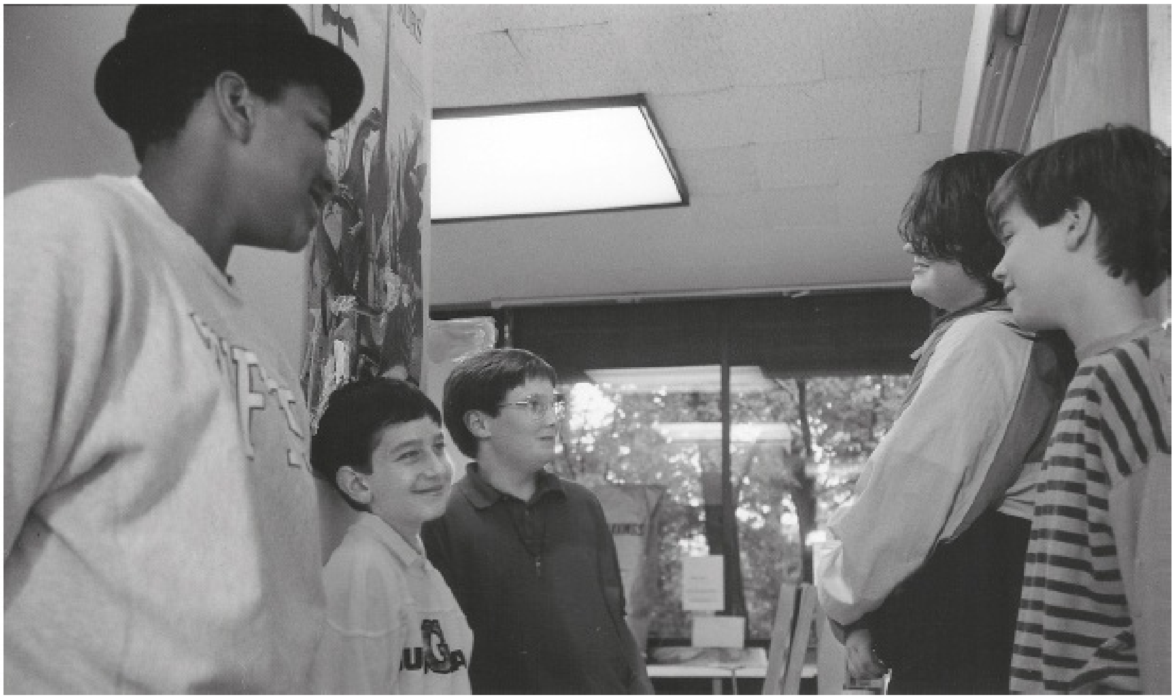


Frontal Positions for Single Setups

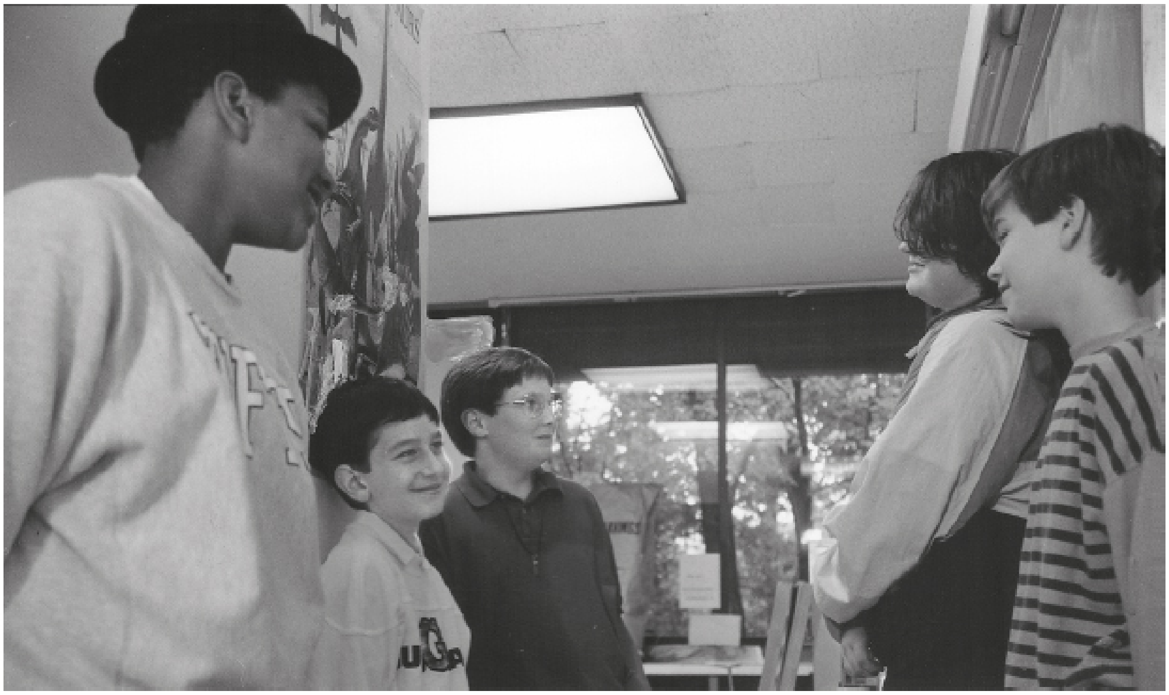
By now the various possibilities for staging two-, three-, and four-or-more-subject dialogue sequences should be familiar as recognizable framing and editing patterns. In midsized groups where each subject is dramatically significant, master shot stagings are often desirable. The three examples that follow show asymmetrical stagings and the use of depth in figure placement.

1



In a group master shot in which the action is staged for one viewpoint, the screen too easily becomes the theatrical proscenium. Rather than have a scene staged across the frame, players can be staged along the lens axis, as with the group of boys in the hallway in frames 1 and 2. Here the players are seen in profile. Foreground players may turn from the camera occasionally to react to background players, but they can be directed to speak or respond to players across from them as well.

2



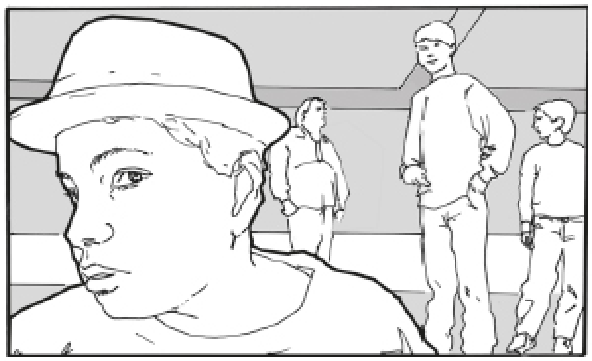
In-Depth Frontal Positions

In this next series of frames, an in-depth composition is used with a foreground player close to the camera. The overly composed theatrical positioning in frame 3 is modified in frame 4 so that the background players form a looser group arrangement.

The evolution of the compositions in frames 1–6 is representative of the staging process carried out on the set by the director, the actors, and the cinematographer. Frames 1 through 6 are all ways of dealing with the same scene, with frame 5 coming closest to an acceptable solution. However, I would probably bring the seated figure on the right forward slightly.

When staging groups, filmmakers are sometimes fearful that their players are not seen clearly within the frame. The result of overcomposed figures is staginess, and the only cure is a disregard for ordered framing. In the following examples, figures are overlapped or cut off by the frame, and this freedom permits many more options for staging action. This style of composition is known as open framing and will be discussed further in a later chapter.

1



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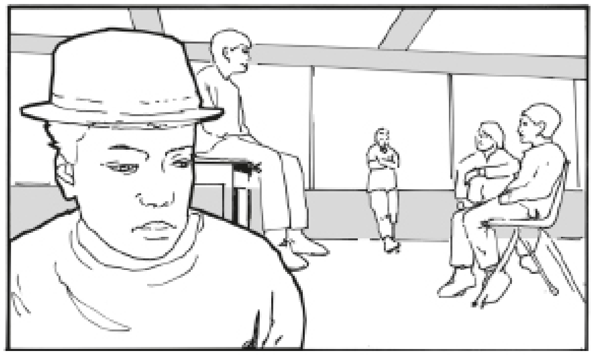

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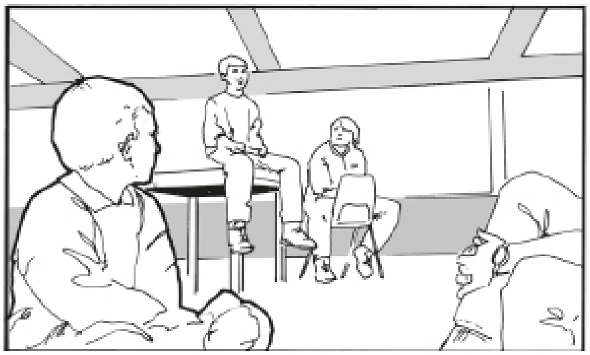

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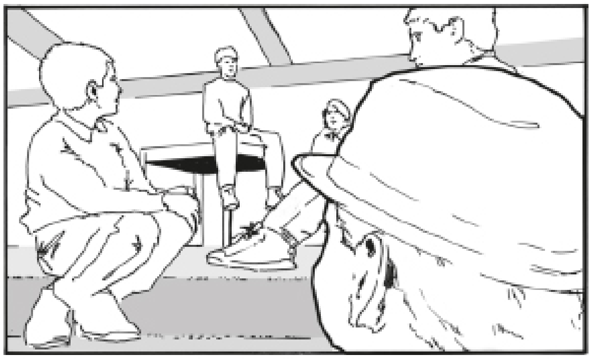

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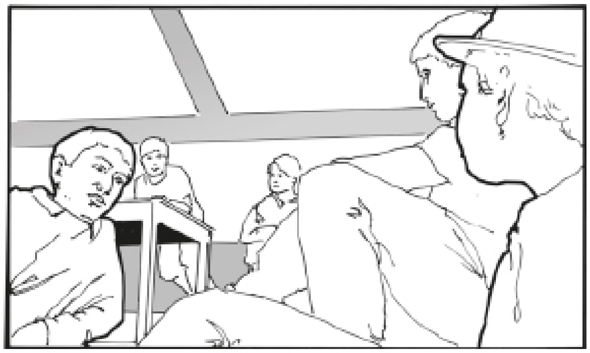

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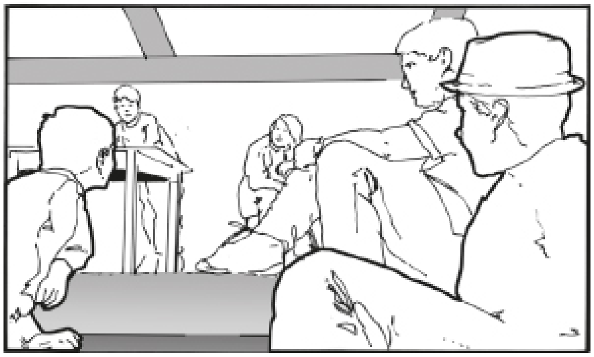


Crowds and Large Groups

In concluding the dialogue-staging section, we come to the treatment of individual players when they are in crowds or other large gatherings of people. When staging a dialogue scene in a crowd, the subjects in conversation are still placed in accordance with the concepts we applied to 2, 3, and 4 players. However, there are some additional camera techniques available that solve some of the spatial problems that arise when the scene space is densely packed with people.

There are two basic approaches to shooting dialogue in or around a crowd: The camera is either in the crowd looking out or outside the crowd looking in. The execution of each approach is largely dependent on the focal length of the lens that you use. Shots framed from within the action are normally taken with a wide or normal lens, while shots taken from outside the action are shot with a telephoto lens.

Telephoto Lenses

Apart from the specific visual appeal of a telephoto shot, long lenses have become popular in the shooting of large crowds for logistical reasons. For instance, it is possible to simulate large masses of people with a limited number of extras strategically placed in depth for the telephoto lens. In addition, due to the shallow depth of field, the telephoto lens can isolate principal subjects from foreground and background elements whether the crowd is staged or real.

At the same time, the camera can be placed at a distance from the crowd, making it easier for the cameraman to work. Spatial relationships within shots and between shots are indefinite due to the shallow depth of field, and the specific location of action is difficult to identify. The telephoto lens permits cameramen to work in crowds discreetly, allowing them to photograph actors in real situations (as in the photos accompanying this section).

The use of the telephoto requires keeping the camera outside the action. If the camera were in the midst of the crowd, it would have to be a great distance from the players in order to frame them, thereby allowing too many extras to come between the camera and the subjects. The result would be that the crowd would obscure the players. Therefore, telephoto shots of subjects within a crowd must be carefully staged so that just the right number of people move between the camera and the players. Since this turns out to be only a few people, 10 to 15 extras can be made to seem like a big crowd.

Wide Lenses

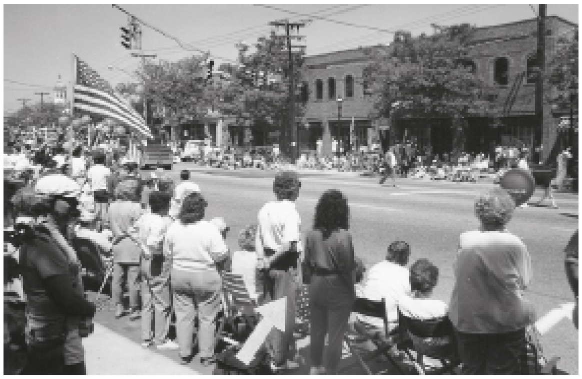
Staging action for the wide lens is far more difficult. Generally, the camera is in the action, close to the subject of the shot. As with the telephoto shot, extras must be carefully arranged between camera and subject, but the greater depth of field and clarity of the normal lens is less forgiving in terms of framing. The positioning of figures is much more critical, and a slight variation of any element can wreck the shot. If the camera and subject move, many more extras are necessary, and because the camera is within the action, a quarter turn takes in 90 degrees of space. This is space that might require dozens or hundreds of extras to fill. At the same time, the camera and crew have to work in close quarters, and moving dolly track or lights requires clearing the area.

For all this, the normal lens has decided advantages for creating understandable geography, as well as for its particular graphic qualities. It is usually necessary to stage physical action with the wider lenses, while dialogue stagings can be shot with a telephoto. We can now look at some examples of actual shots.

Lens Comparisons for Crowd Scenes

The arrow indicates the subjects of our shots. Frame 1 is a moderate wide-angle shot (35 mm) outside the action. Frame 2 is shot through the parade and views our subjects from within the action using a 40 mm lens.

1



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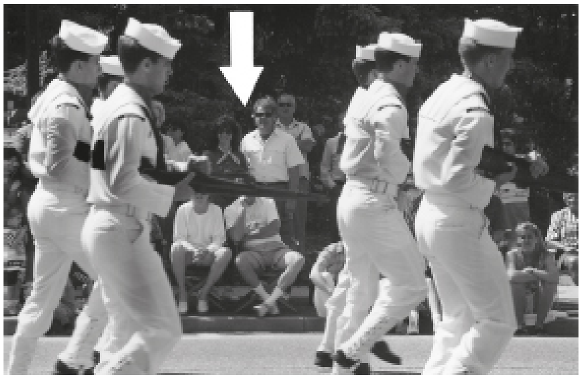

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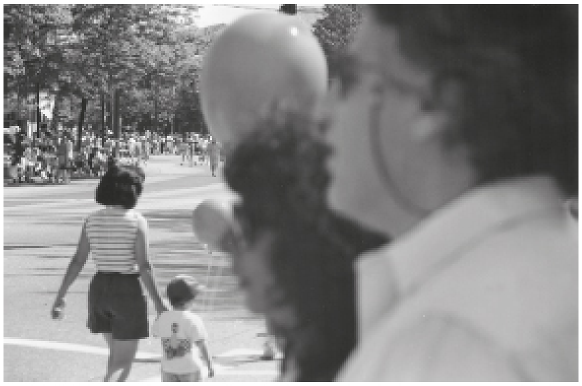

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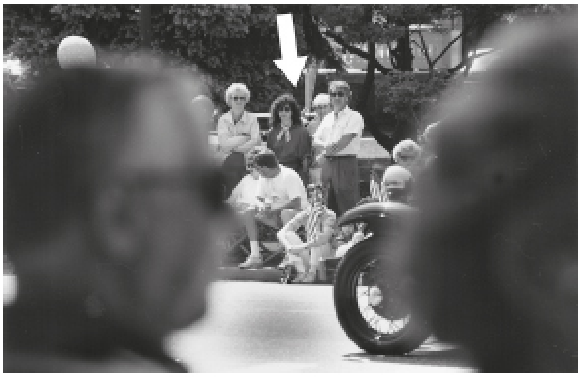

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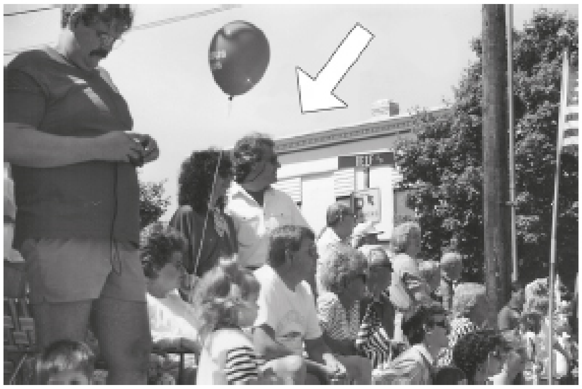

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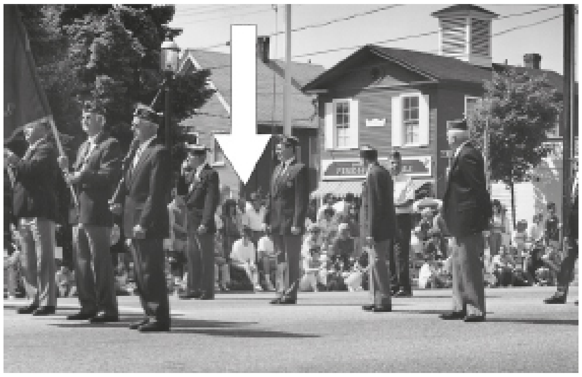
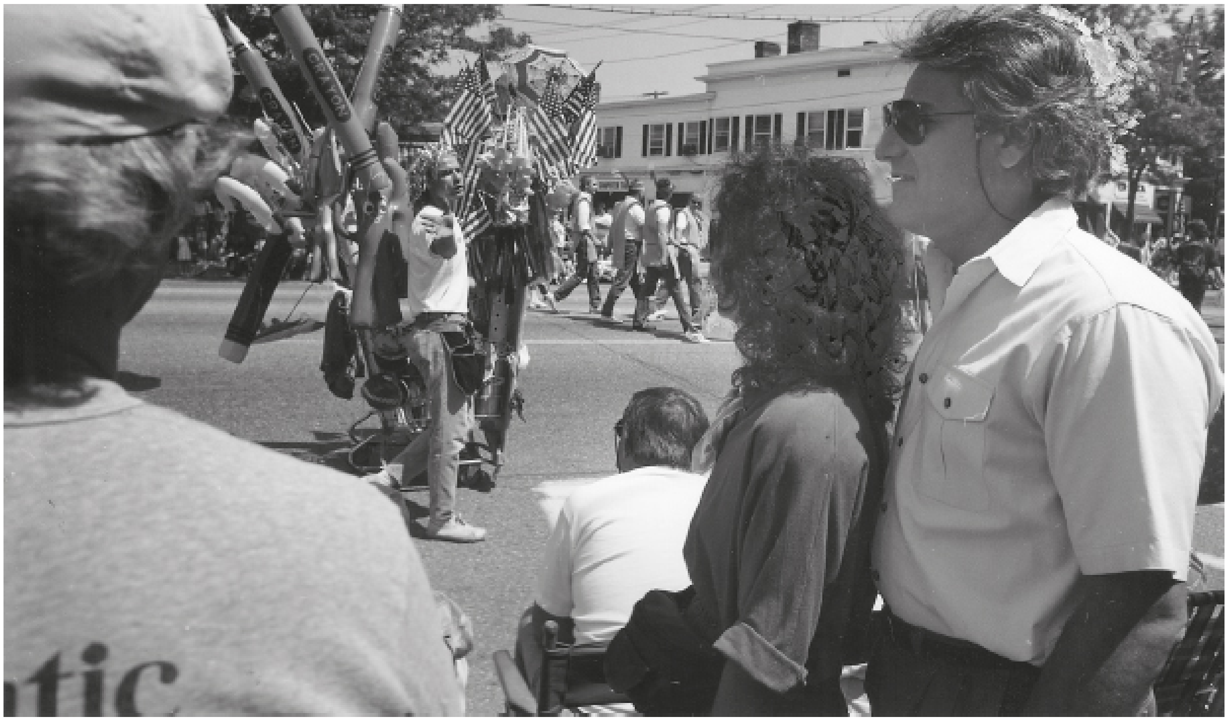
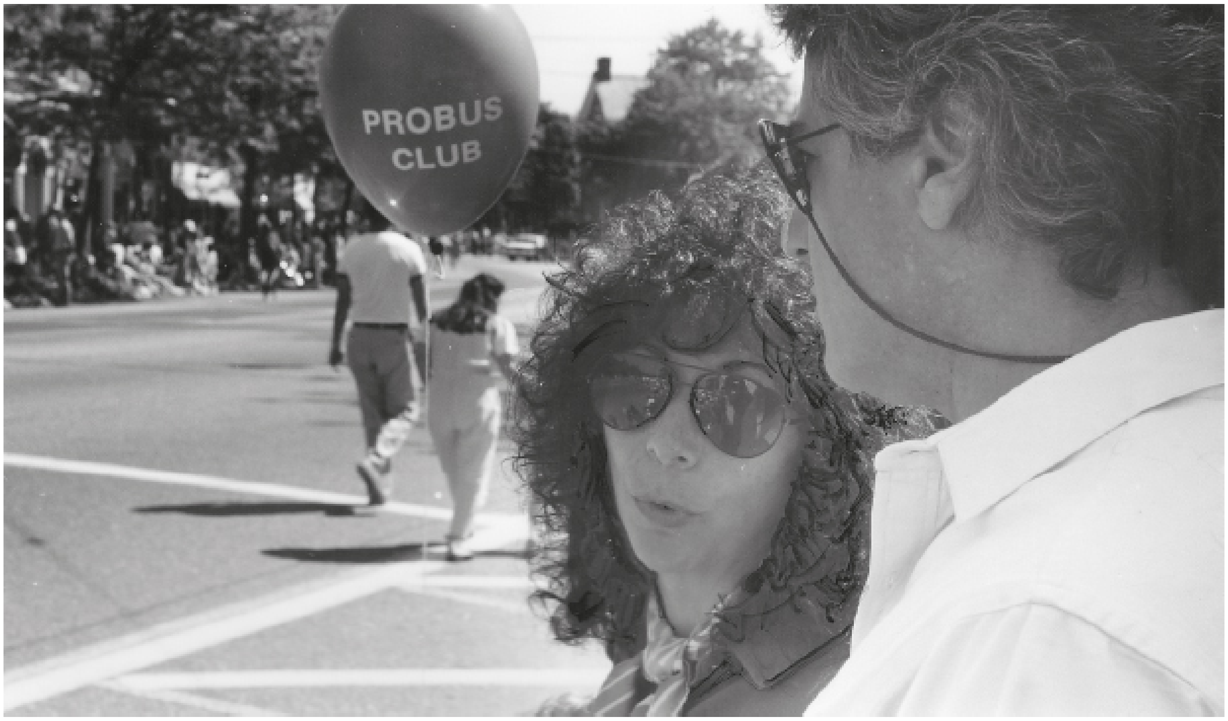


In frame 3, we are again on the same side of the street as our subjects, this time with a longer lens to bring the background closer. One slightly unorthodox effect is that the subjects are in soft focus due to the shallow depth of field. While some filmmakers object to allowing principal subjects to go soft even while they remain the center of attention, I find that the subjects can be recognized if their clothes or appearance has been established in previous shots. Frame 4, taken with a 500 mm lens, was shot from across the street using two foreground spectators as a framing device. Finally, frames 5 and 6 are on the perimeter of the action, very nearly in the thick of things, shot with a 50 mm lens.

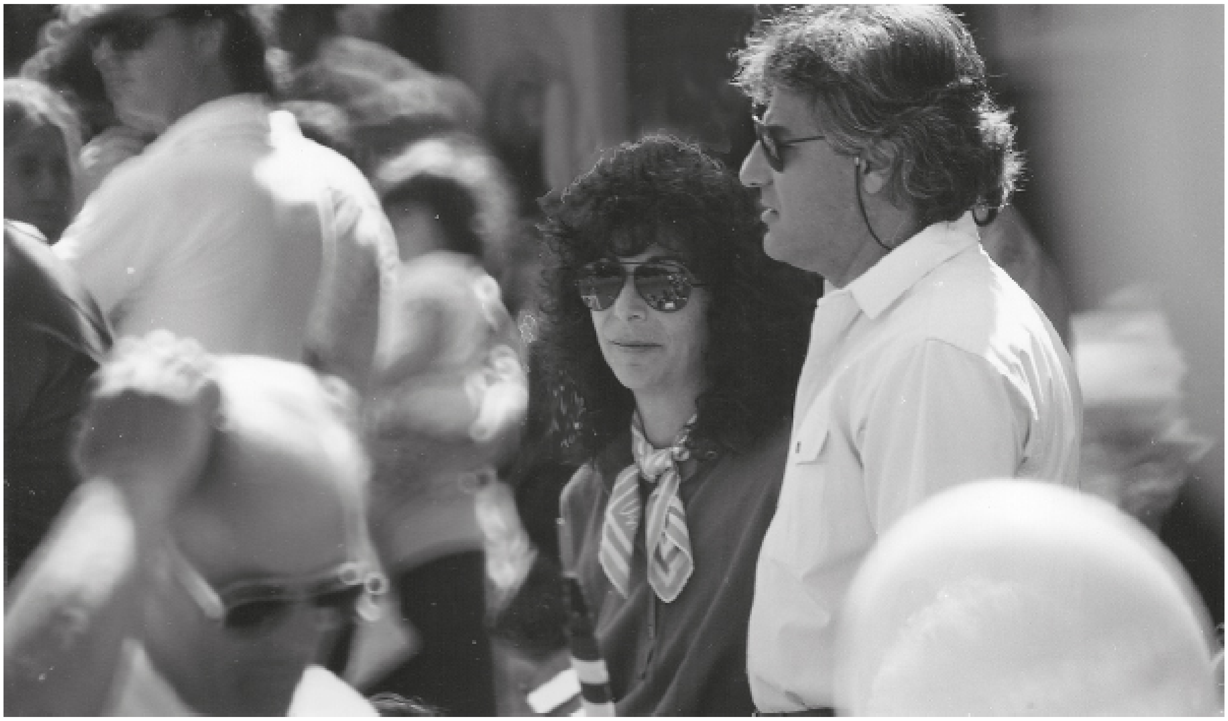
We conclude with a comparison of lenses. First is a 40 mm lens with figures in the middleground, second is a 50 mm lens with the figures in the foreground, and last is a 300 mm lens shot with the figures in the background.



40 mm lens


PROBUS
CLUB

50 mm lens



300 mm lens

12 Mobile Staging

When Fred Astaire left Broadway for the studios of RKO he summed up his thoughts about motion pictures and dance this way: “Either the camera will dance or I will.” This is pretty good advice for a choreographer to follow, but it also happens to be a succinct way of describing the two basic methods of staging mobile action: move the camera or move the subject.

In the previous three chapters on staging dialogue, we built sequences by using multiple camera viewpoints to direct the viewer’s attention — the camera moved around players who remained in a fixed position. There is an alternative to this way of staging action: directing the viewer’s attention from one subject to another by having the subjects move within the space framed by the camera. In practice, both approaches are frequently combined to present a varied and fluid dramatic sequence. In addition to cutting multiple viewpoints together and moving the subject in the frame, we can also move the camera in a tracking or crane shot. These three methods of photographing action in sequence represent the entire range of camera and subject staging techniques.

In Figure 12.1, frames 1 and 2 illustrate a simple shot, reverse shot editing pattern using OTS framings. This is a straightforward way to treat a dialogue scene if the subjects are stationary. The alternative is to allow the players to reposition themselves as part of the action in a single shot, as shown in frames 3 and 4. By having the man turn around in frame 4 we obtain the frontal view that previously required a new shot.

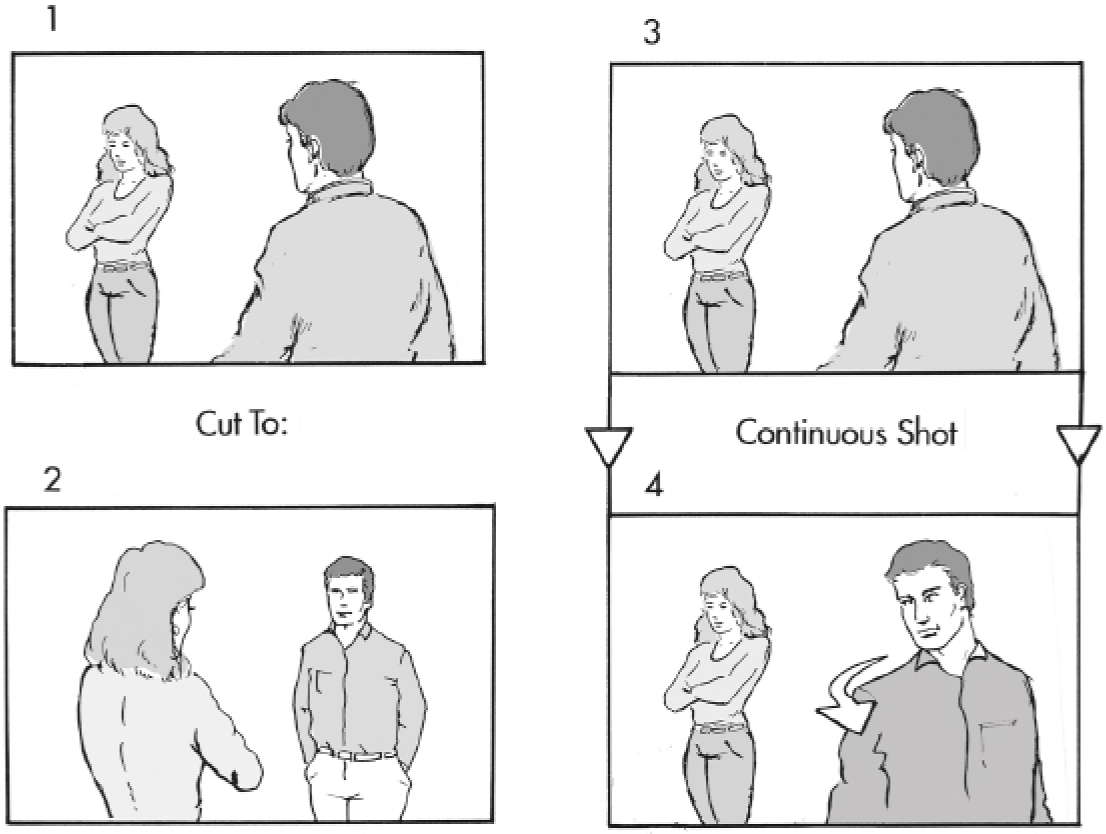


Figure 12.1: Frames 1 and 2 show the shot, reverse shot cutting pattern. Frames 3 and 4 represent a continuous shot in which the man turns around to face the camera. This strategy uses mobile staging to achieve the same results as cutting.

A variation on this same idea of substituting the actor's movement for editing is shown in Figure 12.2. This time the girl in the background of the shot comes forward until she is seen in close-up. The man with his back to the camera in frame 1 turns with her so that they are both facing the camera. In a sense, we have obtained the equivalent of a medium OTS shot, a close-up, and a two-shot without resorting to cutting.

These two examples of mobile staging will give you the basic idea. The only criterion the actor's movement should meet is whether it is motivated or not. This type of staging falls under the category of "stage business." This can mean anything from lighting a cigarette (the classic piece of stage business in the '40s) to moving around a bedroom while getting dressed in the morning. You should never really have to invent artificial business just to add action to a scene. If the story, actors, and the directing process are working together, ideas will emerge from this collaboration that are accurate observations of human behavior.

Building Blocks

Think of the longest, most involved sequence shot you can remember from a film. Now imagine how you might draw that sequence in a storyboard. Since you cannot depict continuous movement in a single panel, you would have to choose key moments in the action and draw them in a series of panels. As it turns out, this is fairly easy because most action staged for a long interrupted shot is composed of these very same movements choreographed into a smooth continuity. We can also reverse the process and devise a continuous shot built from the same individual key events in the action.

We've already looked at the building blocks for this approach in the patterns and positions catalogued in the previous chapters on staging. Working out choreographed movement with the actors is merely a matter of connecting different patterns and positions so that all the separate views of a scene are linked into a single shot.

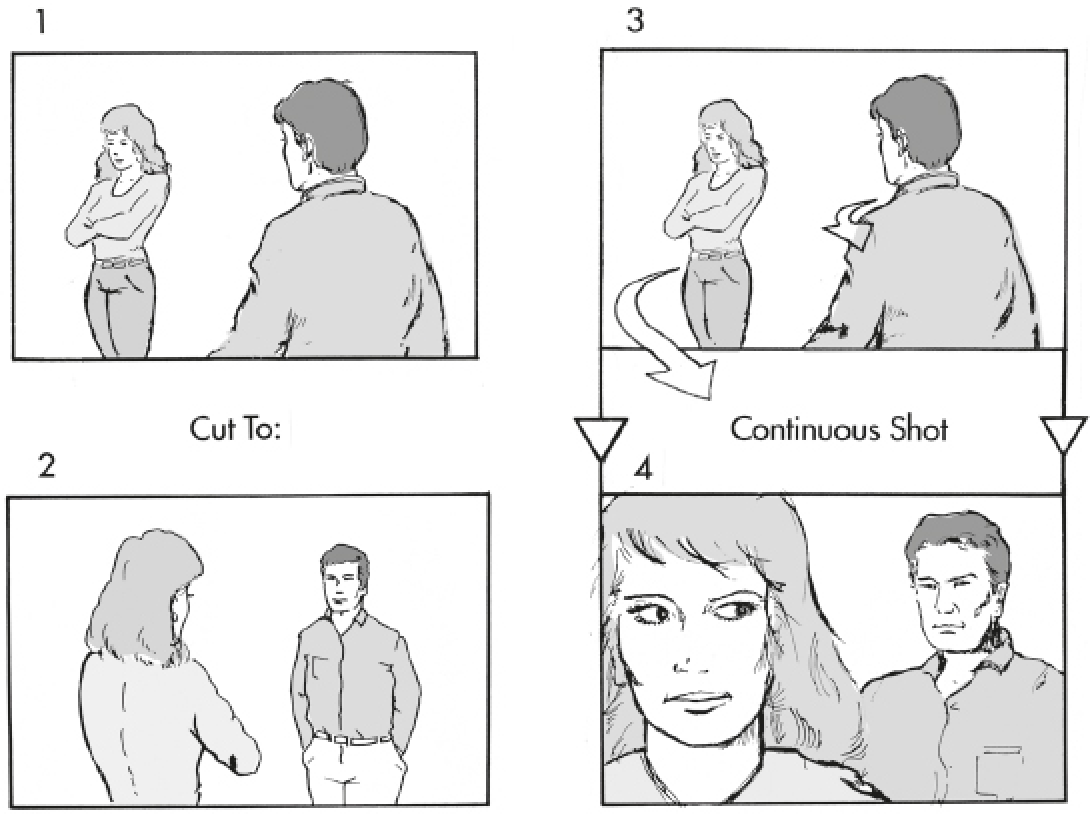


Figure 12.2: These separate frames at left represent a single shot. By using mobile blocking, the actors are seen in different positions and sizes, the same as if we had cut between several camera setups.

Mobile Staging (Example One)

Let’s try building a simple two-position sequence using camera movement and a subject who is repositioned in the shot. This strategy is shown in figure 12.3. The movement of the camera and the actor represents a single unbroken shot. The accompanying diagrams show an aerial view of the choreography.

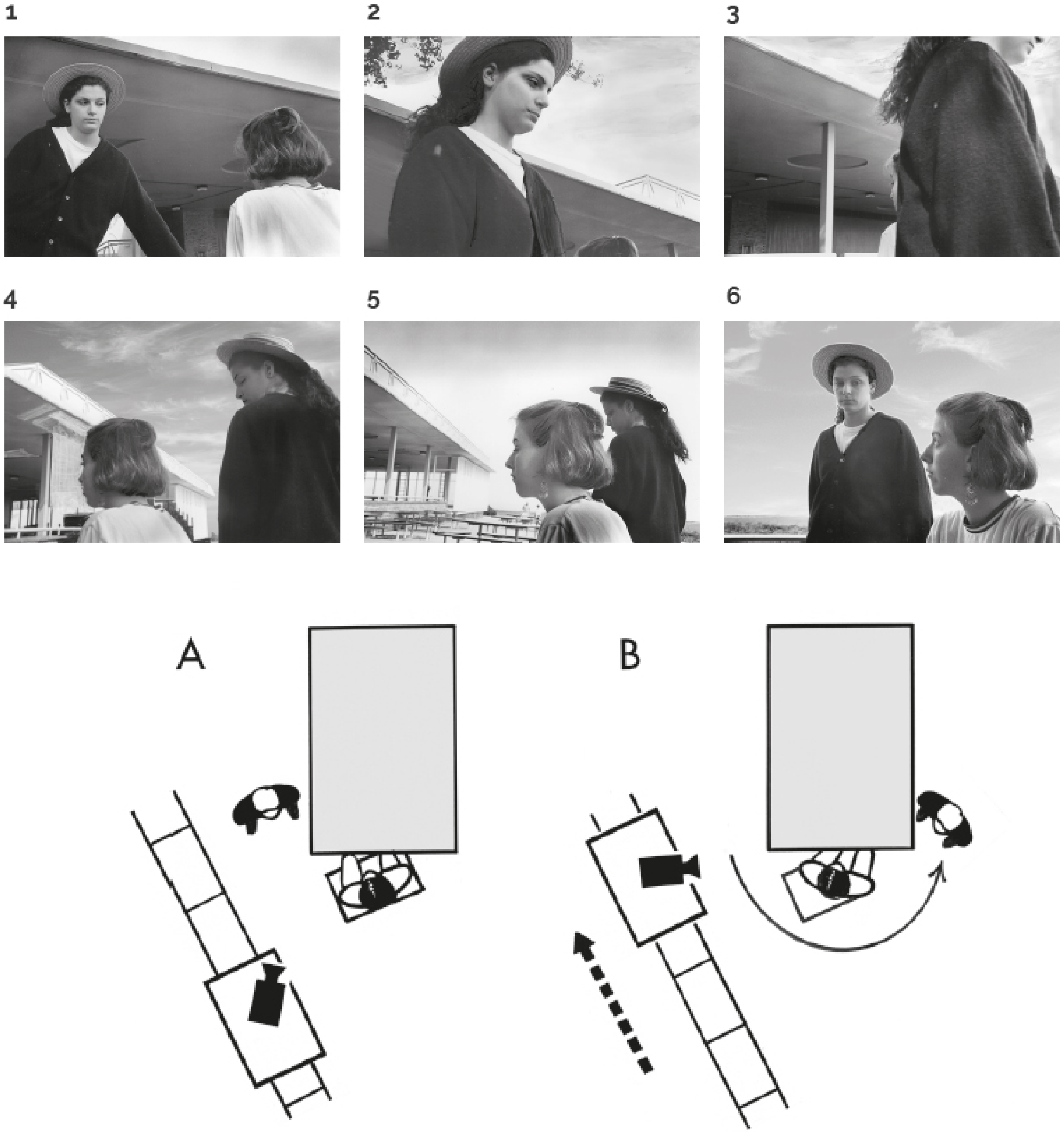


Figure 12.3: We begin with an OTS framing and …

… the camera dollies forward as the girl who is standing moves to the opposite side of the table.

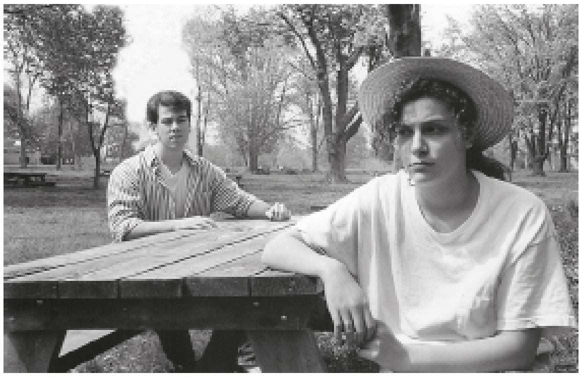
Imagine that the two girls in the photographs have been speaking for several moments in the wide OTS shot in frame 1. Rather than cut to a new shot of the seated girl as she begins to speak, we dolly the camera forward 4 feet while the girl in the hat walks to the other side of the seated girl. In this version both camera and player move simultaneously, and the final staging in frame 6 permits us to see both players. You might recognize this arrangement; it is position five from the two-player stagings in Chapter 9. This particular type of move, in which a subject moves in the opposite direction of the camera, is called a *counter move*. In this version the girl who walks past camera is absent from the frame for a moment, but the whole action is very short and only a few seconds elapse from frame 1 to frame 6. Of course, the variables in timing and positioning are considerable and have a great deal of impact on the dramatic emphasis within the scene.

Now we're ready to try a considerably more ambitious sequence shot using staging patterns and positions we learned in the previous three chapters. We can begin with position four, version #8, from the two-subject dialogue stagings (Chapter 9) and combine it with another position at the picnic table. The following pages illustrate how a series of separate shots can be combined into a single shot by moving the actors and the camera.

Mobile Staging (Example Two)

In frame 1, the girl refuses to acknowledge her boyfriend. He moves forward and takes a seat at the opposite end of the table in frame 2. The schematic drawings show the movement of the camera to accommodate the new staging.

1



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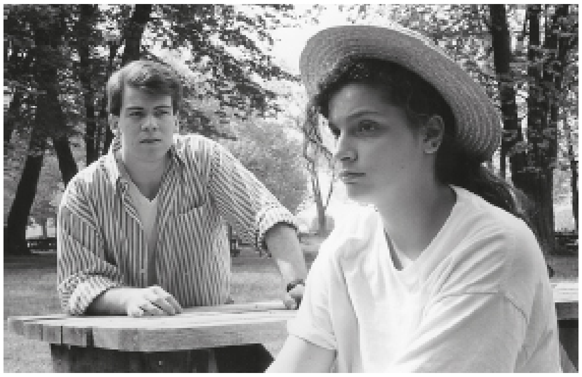
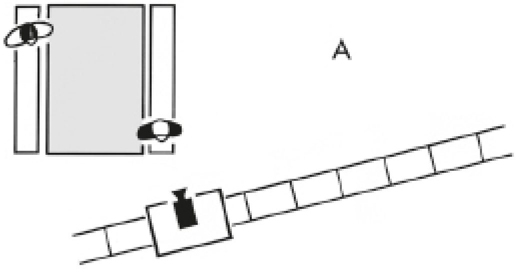
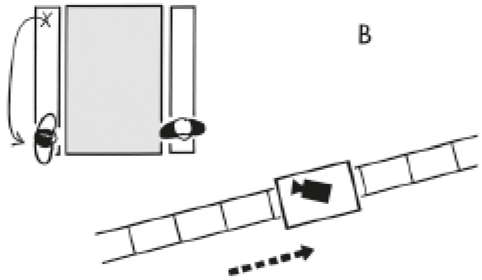
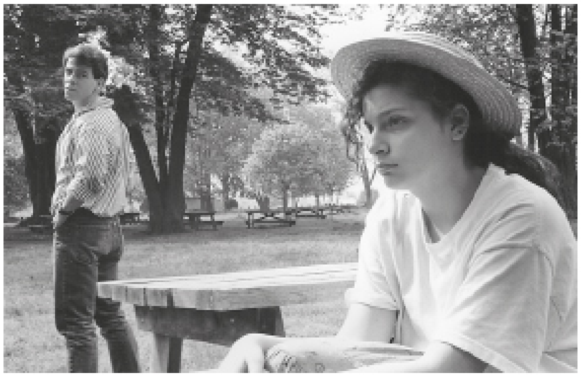






Frustrated, the boy stands up and walks a few steps away, still speaking to the girl (frame 3). After a few moments, he returns to the table (frame 4) and angrily tries to provoke some kind of response from the girl. The camera has not dollied during this action.

3



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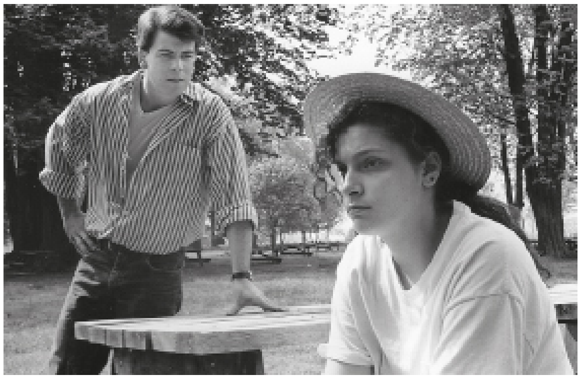
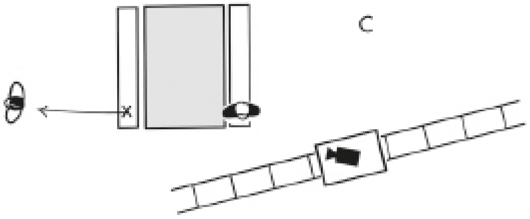
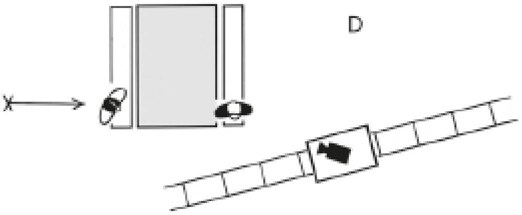
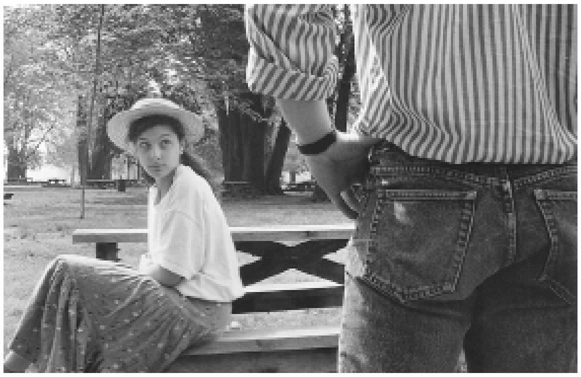






Now the boy walks towards the camera and the camera dollies ahead of him a few feet until he turns to face the girl in frame 5. As the boy speaks, the girl turns toward him to listen (frame 6). As this happens, the camera retracks towards her, leaving the boy out of frame. Once she is framed in a medium shot the camera comes to rest for a few moments.

5



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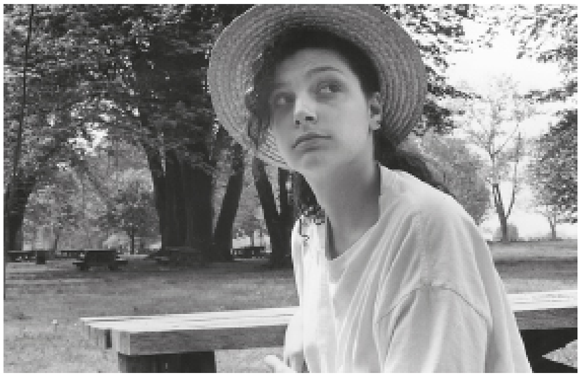
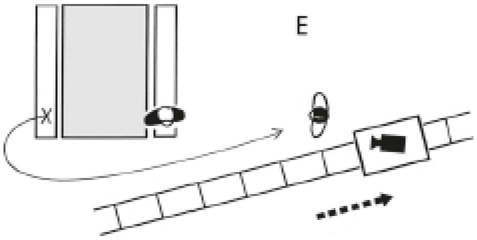
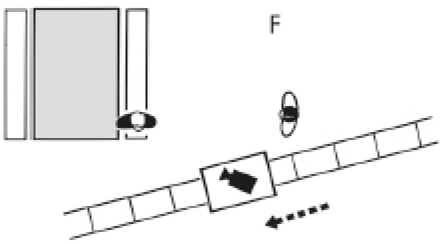
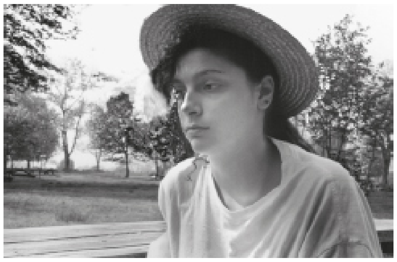






The camera slowly moves in front of the girl in frame 7 as the boy reenters the shot, sitting down behind her in frame 8. The camera comes to rest in this framing for a few moments, but when the boy leans left across the table, the camera moves with him and pushes into a closer shot as he makes his final appeal to the girl in frame 9.

7



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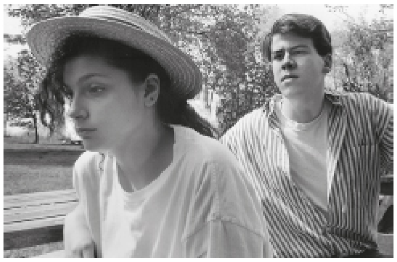

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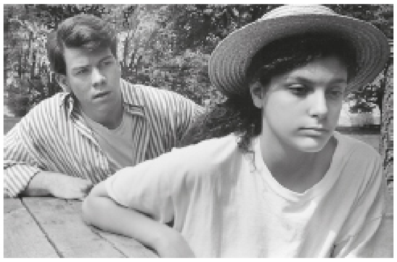

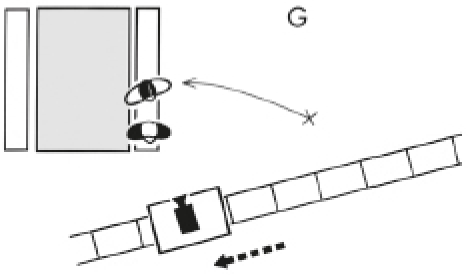

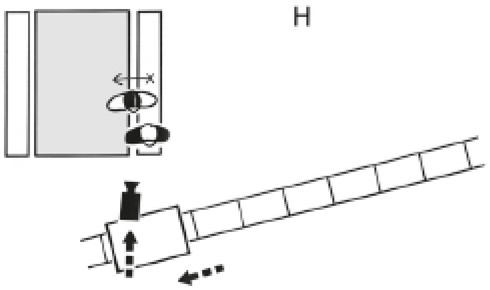

Finally, the boy gives up, and making his parting comments he stands up in frame 10. The camera backs up a few feet to a wider shot as the boy walks away. The final framing of the shot is seen in frame 11.

In this example of mobile staging in a sequence shot, we used several different techniques to get the maximum use of a 15-foot piece of track. This included staging in depth to vary the framing, panning from a stationary position to reframe, retracking over the same space by reversing the direction of the camera, following one subject (the boy) and then another (the girl), and pushing in towards a subject and then backing away.

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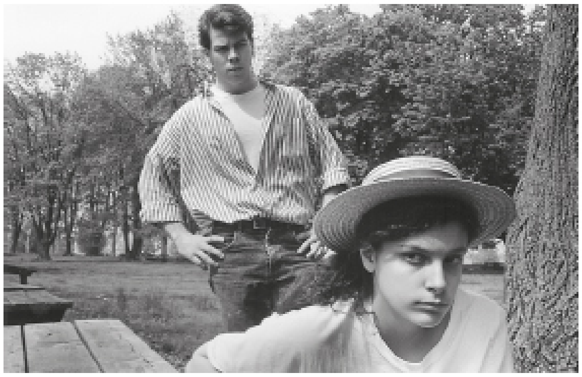

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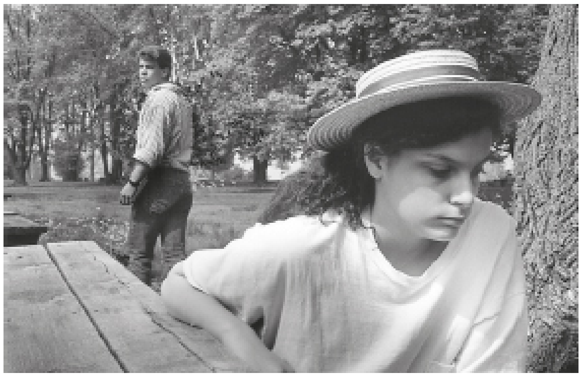
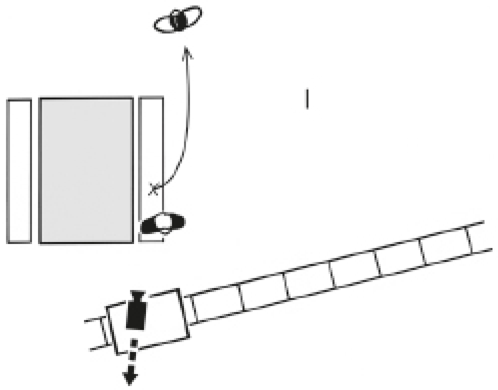




Visualizing the staging of a scene requires collaboration on the set by the director, the cast, the cinematographer, the weather, happenstance, and any crewmember who has a good suggestion at the time. Particularly important is the camera operator: The speed and timing of a camera move and the transfer of attention from one actor to another are ultimately his responsibilities. These subtleties cannot be anticipated in a storyboard and must be worked out on the set during rehearsal. The communication between the cinematographer and the director must be very precise if the director is to get what he or she wants.

Loosening Up Your Staging Style

While the director is helping the actors to shape their performances and interpret the script, he is evaluating the visual and technical consequences of whatever staging improvisation takes place on the set. The restrictions placed by the camera on an actor's movement are usually a distraction to him or her, and complex staging only increases the problem. On the one hand, the director wants to make the actor's job easier, but he also has a visual plan that must be accommodated. There is no magic solution to this opposition of goals except for the director to have a broad knowledge of the creative options. The following suggestions are intended to overcome some staging conventions that hold directors back from taking chances.

Action and Reaction

First, there are only two types of shots in a conversation: the action and the reaction. Filmmakers are frequently over-concerned about the action. The truth is, we learn as much from the reaction as we do from the action. Knowing this will loosen up your staging because it means the person speaking need not be the center of attention. One version of this is shown at left.

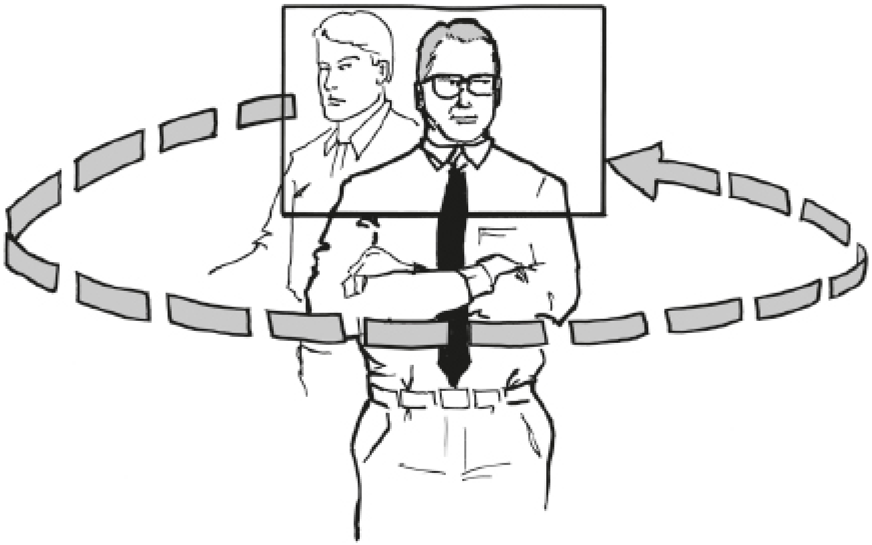


Figure 12.4: The arrow indicates the path of the background player. He passes the camera once before entering the frame on camera right. Our only indication of the background player's location is the movement of the foreground player's head or eyes, which might follow the other man as he walks.

The choreography in Figure 12.4 shows the man in the background circling our main subject. As you can see from the two frames, most of the background player's action is offscreen. The camera actually pushes into a CU of the foreground figure so we can see his reaction to a long speech made by the background player as he walks out of frame.

The reaction doesn't have to be a CU of the man's face. It could also be a CU of his hands as he nervously fingers his car keys or a shot of his foot tapping impatiently, or any other visual or physical index to the person's feelings. If the person who is reacting is looking into a fireplace, we might see the flames for an extended period or just a shot of ashes. Sharing his point of view can help shape our understanding of his reaction.

Moving the Center of Interest

The camera following a subject who is the center of interest can move around other players so that the subject directs us to the reactions of the other players. This can be done in a single shot. The subject who is the center of interest need not be emotionally dominant but may have special knowledge that is of interest to the other players. From a practical standpoint the advantage of this staging is that one player moves while the other players are stationary.

An extreme example of the moving center-of-interest strategy is the Marine Corps sergeant drilling new recruits, a scene we have watched in many movies. If the camera pans to follow the sergeant in a long continuous shot as he moves in and around a small formation of men, the background will include the faces of the recruits while featuring the sergeant. Carefully executed, this staging technique can provide many opportunities to include action and reactions simultaneously in a variety of compositions.

Indirection

Not every story point and line of dialogue in a scene needs to be emphasized. Film is such a direct medium that holding back its expressive power from time to time is a way of emphasizing all the other moments. In staging actors and choosing camera setups, this could mean relegating some action to the background even if it is central to the narrative.

Similarly, the notion that an important line of dialogue requires a close-up is simply not true. People are often most attentive to the person who speaks most softly. What this means for the filmmaker is that he or she is freed from trying to compose every dramatic point full screen. Sometimes the smallest gesture is the most telling.

13 Depth of the Frame

So far, we have concentrated on the placement of the subject in front of the camera. First, we looked at a system of patterns and positions to organize the staging of actors. Second, we looked at ways of moving the actors so that several staging patterns and positions could be combined into a single choreographed shot. This approach is organized around the subject in a space rather than the space itself. While this gives us considerable control over compositional elements within the frame, we will not have explored the subject of staging fully until we examine the scene space in which the actors move.

It's not unusual today to hear about mainstream feature directors who shoot dialogue sequences with five and six setups for just one actor. This is clearly a symptom of indecision and a failure to commit to a directorial point of view. Admittedly, if shots were judged by pictorial quality alone, there are dozens, perhaps hundreds, of interesting compositions that a director and cameraman could devise. We can cut the problem down to size by organizing the possibilities according to a few basic conceptions of space.

The Dramatic Circle of Action

No matter what you are shooting, the space before the camera has limits within which the action of the scene is confined. As a way of organizing the scene space, we will divide this action area into three segments using the traditional terms for depth in the graphic arts: the foreground immediately in front of the lens, the middleground, and, farthest from the camera, the background. In staging action for the camera, these terms have a particular meaning. Simply put, the dramatic circle of action for any scene is determined by the size and shape of the space that the action covers.

In the Action/Out of the Action

At a football stadium, space is clearly defined: The players are confined to the field and the fans to the seats. Assuming that the game is the center of attention, there are only two ways of looking at the action: from the outside looking in as a spectator, or from the inside looking out at the action surrounding you as a player on the field.

"In" or "out" of the action are the two basic ways that the camera can record action and space. The variable here is the "shape" of the action. A parade, for example, may appear in a long line as it approaches the camera, stretching into the distance through foreground, middleground, and background, or, it can cross our path horizontally, like a curtain drawn across our field of vision. If we are in the playground of an elementary school, a game of tag can be far more shapeless than a parade or a football game, with kids running every which way, disappearing around the corners of the school or behind us.

Typically, being in the action is more intimate in dialogue sequences and more chaotic in action sequences. POV sequences of the type that Hitchcock devised often place the cameras in the action. This option also increases the likelihood that multiple angles will be needed because being in the action means you have to turn a full rotation to see everything happening within the dramatic circle of action. Stating from outside the action, the camera can cover everything in a single wide shot.

Staging in Depth

For our first example illustrating the circle of dramatic action, we will concentrate on camera placement rather than blocking. Here's the scene: A man walks from a payphone to his car. A profile illustration shows us the location in Figure 13.1.

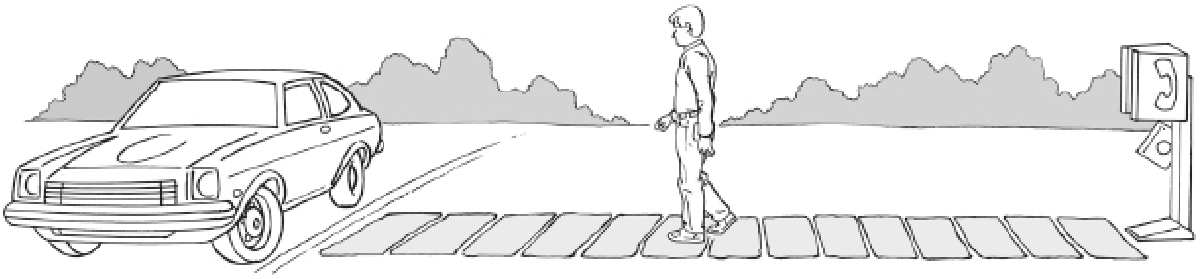


Figure 13.1: Ext. phone booth — suburban neighborhood.

Let's first assume that we won't be able to cut multiple views together and that the action will be photographed in a single shot. The aerial view in

Figure 13.2 illustrates camera positions in and out of the circle of dramatic action. The shape of the circle is determined by the space covered by the actor walking to his car. If he were to make a side trip off the flagstone walk for any reason, the circle of action would include this additional space.

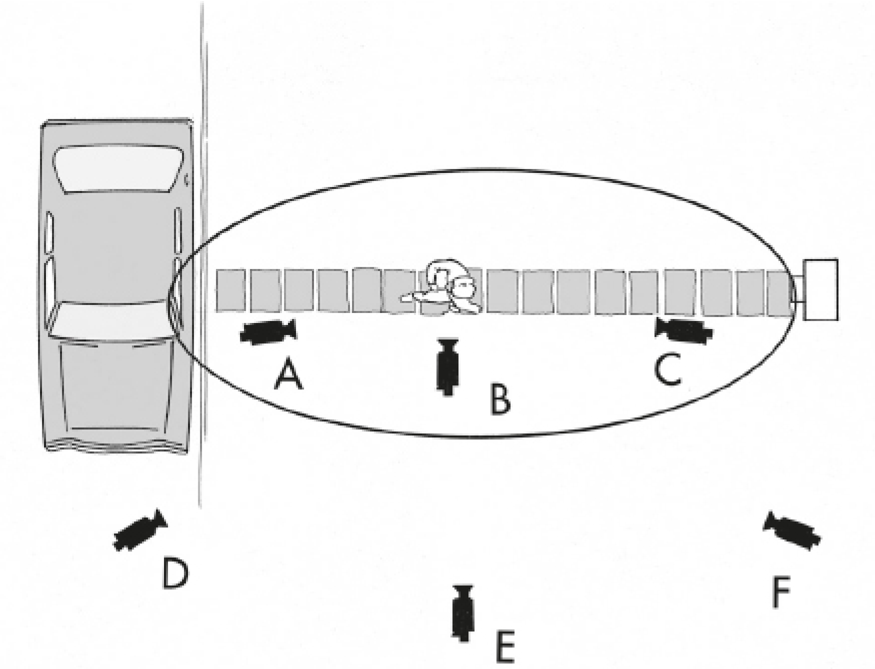


Figure 13.2: The circle is drawn closely around the general space that the actor covers in his movement.

Camera positions A, B, and C are all *in the action*. In order for any one camera to cover the actor's entire movement from the payphone to the car, the camera would have to pan until aimed out of the circle. Also, the man's prominence increases or decreases depending on whether he is walking towards or away from the camera. In a sense, the action has a beginning, middle, and end, like a self-contained drama. Being in the action also affects point of view: Positions A, B, and C accentuate our identification with the salesman, while positions D, E, and F produce shots that tend toward distanced and more neutral observation.

Camera positions *outside the action* can cover the actor's entire movement with little or no panning if a sufficiently wide-angle lens is used. A camera outside the action maintains a stationary, narrow view of the man's entire movement, while a camera inside the action might pan as much as 180 degrees to photograph the same action. Also, when photographed from outside the action the actor remains about the same size throughout the shot. If photographed by a camera inside the action, his or her size in the frame would vary considerably.

When there is more than one player in a scene, the circle of dramatic action is determined by the placement of the players. If the actors remain in the A, I, or L pattern without movement, the circle of dramatic action is drawn tightly around the pattern.

The Purpose of the Dramatic Circle of Action

Like the A, I, and L patterns, the circle of action is a way of looking at staging situations to discover familiar arrangements of camera and subject. The immediate benefit of analyzing action this way is that a filmmaker may discover new ways of setting up a scene. It is particularly useful when it helps a director to gain an overview of a complex staging.

To help familiarize yourself with the circle of action, learn to watch television and movie sequences in terms of space rather than shots. This means visualizing the geography of the location and the placement of the camera within that space. One good exercise is to keep track of where the camera is stationed for any scene staged in an interior location. Pay particular attention to how each new scene is introduced in the opening shots. You will soon begin to recognize basic strategies for establishing scene space and learn how each approach affects the narrative.

For instance, cinematographer Gordon Willis often placed the camera deep in the circle of action and permitted the players to flow around the camera as though it were an intimate witness. This results in framings and compositions in which a player passes within inches of the lens, momentarily obscuring the background. Using the opposite approach, director Jim Jarmusch prefers to keep his distance from the action, often using deadpan graphic framings that are like comic strip panels. Jarmusch often likes to stay outside the circle of action for entire scenes. Looking at the work of a random selection of filmmakers, such as Bernardo Bertolucci, Otto Preminger, David Lynch, Spike Lee, and Francois Truffaut, will provide examples of the various ways that space can be presented.

Interior Depth

Looking at the way a wide selection of directors set up a scene in a room will confirm that there are only three places to put the camera: the foreground, the middleground, or the background. Shown in Figure 13.3 is an aerial view of a room with one camera placed adjacent to the door, a second in the center of the room, and a third at the wall farthest from the door. If a player enters the room and takes a seat at the table, the choice of camera position determines whether or not the player approaches the camera (B or C) or walks away from the camera (A). Because the room is relatively small, all three positions are in the circle of action.

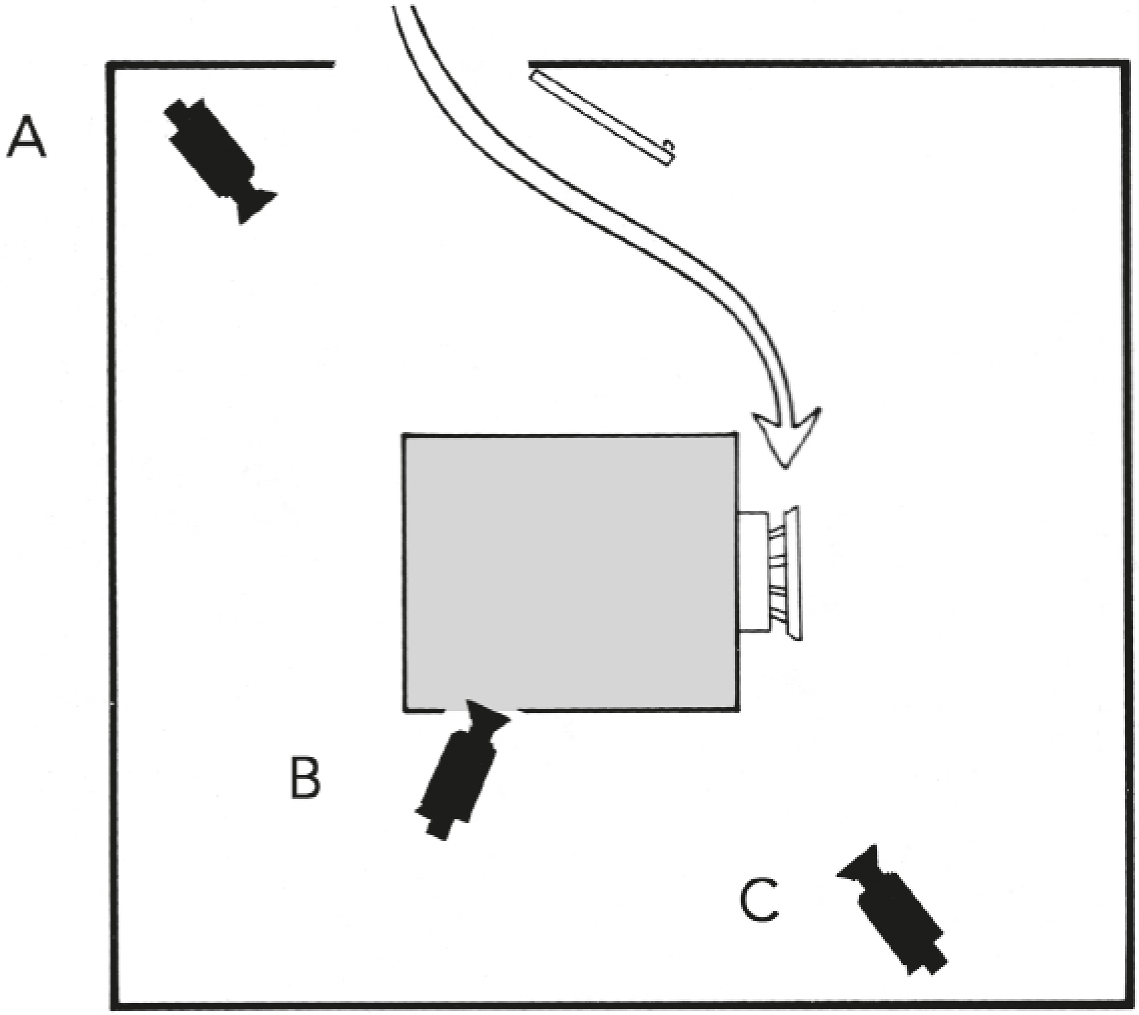
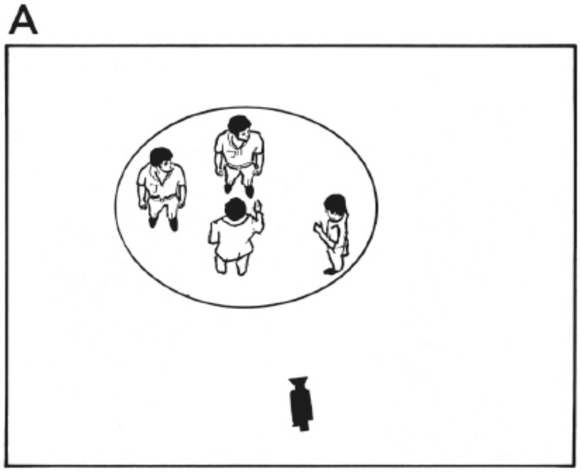


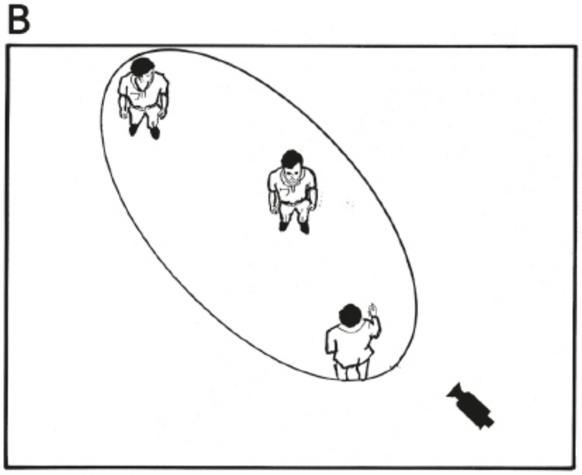
Figure 13.3

Once we have established the location with one of the three basic camera positions, the staging of actors is the next decision. Figure 13.4 includes three diagrams of rooms, each showing one of the three basic uses of the circle of action. It doesn't matter which of the staging patterns (A, I, or L) we're using. What we are interested in is whether or not the camera is in or out of the action. For instance, we could have a tightly staged A pattern with actors standing close together, or an A pattern in which they are spread out across a room. For any given pattern, the camera can be inside or outside the action.

Figure 13.4



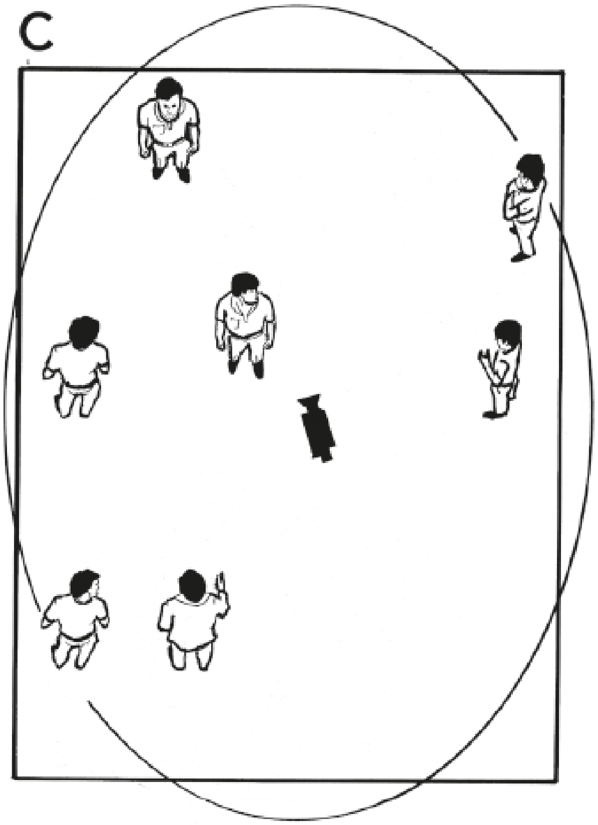
A. Placing the camera outside the action and locating a cluster of actors in some part of a room is the most common staging technique. Cutting is usually required for differentiation, since all the players are approximately the same distance from the camera and are therefore seen in similar shot sizes.



B. Deep staging of this type is typical of Orson Welles and William Wyler. It permits the use of a single setup so that cutting, if used at all, is kept to a minimum.

C. This is an exaggerated version of a type of staging in which the camera is at the center of the circle of action. It is virtually the antithesis of frontality. The camera can point anywhere from this central location, but the deployment of the actors on the perimeter of the room forces cutting, since no single composition can include more than two players.

C



Staging in Depth

Using extensive depth in the staging of shots serves two purposes: One, it can eliminate cutting by allowing the filmmaker to compose subjects within a single shot, and two, it enables the director to selectively emphasize dramatic elements. Graphically, staging in depth depends on the use of scale. This creates oppositions within the frame that can be substituted for the differentiation between players that is normally established by editing. We saw this in several of the patterns and positions illustrated in earlier chapters. Though it might seem axiomatic that near players are stronger in the frame than far players, attention can be shifted to the far player by the use of lighting, depth of field, and narrative context. Mobile staging can further extend the range of emphasis so that near and far players can exchange positions or meet in the middleground on equal terms.

This is the fundamental staging difference between Jean Renoir and Orson Welles's use of deep space. In *The Rules of the Game*, Renoir moved his actors from the foreground to the background in a single setup using them to lead the attention of the viewer from one location to the next in order to introduce the next stage of the story. Welles, on the other hand, was inclined to separate his players in foreground and background spaces. This was frequently done in *Citizen Kane* to isolate Kane emotionally from those around him. Near the end of the film, Kane and Susan Alexander are staged in depth at opposite ends of a huge room, each imprisoned spatially by the camera. Welles's space is used for separating his characters; Renoir uses space so that his characters will intersect.

Another more conceptual use of the depth of the frame is the linking of ideas through space. For instance, a clock in the extreme foreground of a shot may remind us that the old man in the background hasn't long to live. There is no reason to limit the frame to only two levels of meaning, and the depth of the frame can be divided into as many distinct areas as can be clearly defined by the filmmaker.

Deep-Focus Cinematography

In-depth staging is often confused with deep-focus cinematography. Though they are frequently used together, the connection is not automatic. There are times when staging in depth permits the foreground or background to be slightly out of focus for pictorial reasons, or attention may be shifted by moving the area of focus from a far to a near subject. The type of deep focus associated with Orson Welles, William Wyler, and cinematographer Gregg Tolland used short focal-length lenses stopped down to small apertures to keep foreground and background in focus. When this appeared as a staging style in the '40s, deep-focus photography was at the cutting edge of technology. Today, faster films (and the resulting smaller apertures and increased depth of field) have extended the range of the area in focus, making deep-focus work considerably easier. But since there are still limitations to the available depth of field in any lens, special techniques for deep-focus photography have been developed.

Special Effects to Achieve Depth

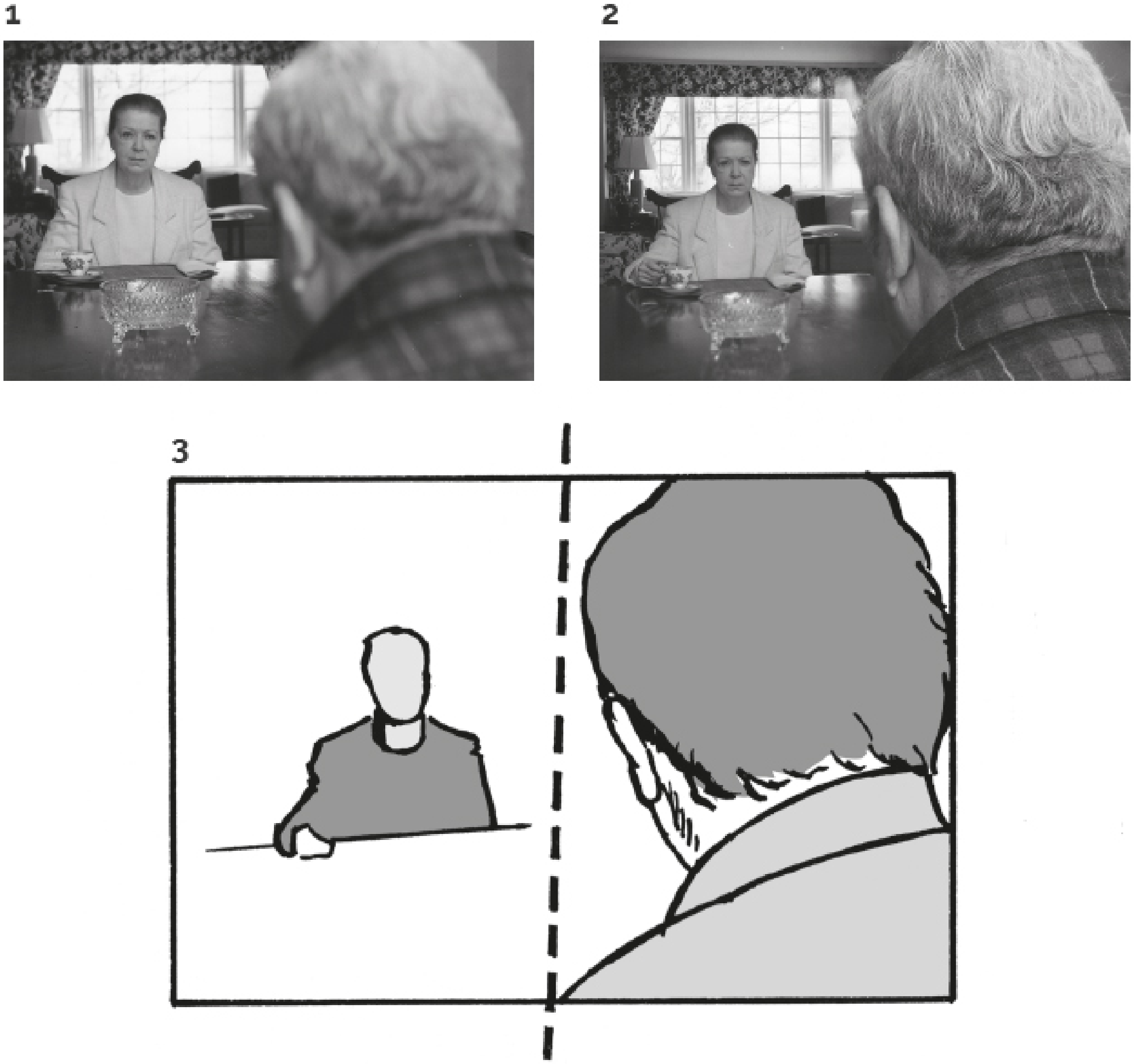
There are several alternatives to wide-angle lenses for deep-focus photography. In *Citizen Kane*, some of the most striking deep-focus compositions were accomplished with in-camera effects that could not be achieved at that time with just a wide-angle lens. These were accomplished by exposing the film twice with the camera locked down. For instance, on the first exposure, one side of the frame was masked while the unmasked side was focused on a foreground element very close to the camera. For the next exposure, the film was rewound to the same starting point and the opposite side of the frame was covered so that the foreground side would be unaffected by the second exposure. During the second camera pass, the lens was refocused at a background element and recorded on the previously masked side of the frame. In this way, two areas of focus were combined onto one strip of film, permitting extreme deep-focus effects.

In the end shot of Hitchcock's *Spellbound*, we share the POV of a man about to commit suicide. We see his hand in the extreme foreground as he turns the gun towards the camera (himself) and fires. This type of dynamic framing was standard practice in the adventure comics of the time, but Hitchcock found he was unable to hold focus on the foreground gun and the background at the same time. Hitchcock's solution was to have the prop department build an oversized gun and hand. The prop could be placed farther from the lens within the depth of field and still fill the frame as though it were in the extreme foreground.

Split-Field Lenses

One of the simplest solutions to the problem of filming extreme foreground and background space is to use a split-field diopter lens. A full (or unsplit) diopter lens is simply a lens that is attached to the main optic already on the camera to permit close-up photography. Technically, a diopter is a unit of measurement for the negative focal length of a diverging lens, but over the years, it has come to mean a close-up lens attachment. Diopter lenses are attached to the end of the main lens like a filter. Since a diopter permits a lens to focus closer to the subject, a split-diopter does the same thing, but only affects one side of the lens. The uncovered side retains the normal focal length, while the covered side has a shortened focal length. Therefore, the lens can be focused on far objects and near subjects simultaneously. The effect isn't perfect though. Since the diopter covers only part of the lens, a slight blurring is visible along the line where the effect begins. This line must be concealed through artful composition of all the elements in the shot. Furthermore, split-diopters can only be used with the camera locked off with foreground and background elements restricted to one half of the frame, so that no person or object moves across the line.

Figure 13.5



In frame 1, the man’s head is beyond the depth of field. By using the split diopter in frame 2 the foreground and background are in focus. Diopter lenses can be rotated and positioned so that the split line (frame 3) can be located at the most advantageous place in the shot.

Frames 1 and 2 of Figure 13.5 show the effect of a split-field lens on a conventional OTS framing. In this case, a 40 mm lens set at f/8 fails to hold both subjects in focus in frame 1. As you can see, the man is out of focus. Using the split-diopter, the back of the man's head is sharply defined even though he is only approximately 14–18 inches in front of the lens. The location of the split line is shown in frame 3. You can detect a small degree of blurring along this line in the photo.

Compressed Depth

Where Welles and Renoir utilized deep-focus photography, filmmakers such as Robert Altman and Akira Kurosawa turned to documentary films for inspiration, appropriating telephoto lens documentary techniques. For Kurosawa the shallow-focus effect characteristic of telephoto lenses was added to his already personal and wide-ranging style, which was rooted fundamentally in Hollywood technique. Altman, however, developed a style that relied far more on long lenses, creating a muted and dreamy *mise-en-scène* in which his characters are seen in overlapping images and sounds. He did this by using telephoto lenses in the familiar documentary fashion to move in close, but also in a new way by shooting his wide and medium shots in the widescreen format, thereby compressing his master shots.

The Staging Patterns and Telephoto Lenses

By eliminating depth in the frame, telephoto lenses emphasize the width of the scene space. Differentiation between staging patterns becomes more difficult unless the separation of players is lateral. This is particularly true when subjects overlap in the frame. Mobile staging is equally problematic with telephoto lenses since only lateral movement effectively emphasizes key moments in a scene. Subjects repositioning themselves in depth will appear to move without arriving at a new space. For the same reason camera movement in depth will appear to be negligible.

Conversely, lateral camera movement with a telephoto lens will exaggerate planes of depth. For instance, a lateral tracking move will create powerful graphic tensions between two subjects standing a few feet apart. The background, brought up close by the characteristic long lens spatial compression, will be emphasized moving across the frame like a huge cyclorama.

14 Camera Angles

In narrative film, there are many reasons for varying the viewing angle: You might change the angle in order to follow the subject, reveal or withhold story information, change point of view, provide graphic variety, establish a location, or develop mood. Of all these, following the subject is primary. This approach tends to overlook the importance of the space in which the action takes place, when in fact it supplies the context that defines the subject.

In part, this division of the subject and space is a holdover from the studio system of the ’30s and ’40s. In order to cut down on expensive location shooting, dialogue scenes were photographed in studio sets and later integrated with stock location footage, creating the illusion of a spatially continuous world. The unconvincing process shots with cars driving in front of projected backgrounds never fooled anyone, but the story and the stars were held to be the only really important elements anyway. The audience paid to see the stars, and if the stars pleased them, the unconvincing effects were overlooked. By establishing a scene space in a wide shot and moving to medium shots to photograph the subject, the studios were able to frequently save money by sacrificing the full expression of the spatial/dramatic context of a scene.

Today, the separation of subject and environment continues, and though location shooting has replaced the studio, many directors still consider photography of the actors to be the main storytelling imagery, with the location the equivalent of stage scenery, appropriate only for establishing shots.

The truth is that the subject is never separate from the location in either the narrative or the pictorial sense. The subject of a shot is often the subject *and* the location taken together, each informing the other and creatively inseparable. Together they can contribute to the mood and atmosphere, shape psychological and dramatic elements, and interact to produce new meaning in any shot. The spatial relationship of subject and environment is largely determined by the camera angle.

By themselves, camera angles have no meaning. The (by now) reductive analysis that claims that low-angle views of a subject place the subject in a dominant position while high-angle views place the subject in a diminutive position is only valid in certain situations. The value of a shot really depends on the narrative.

For example, in *Citizen Kane*, low-angle shots are used throughout the entire movie, but their significance depends on the context. In the early scenes of Kane as a young man, when he seems to be a brash crusader, we may have ambivalent feelings about his use of power, but we probably envy the way he is able to snub the powerful forces of the status quo as represented by his stodgy guardian Thatcher. In most of these scenes, the ceilings are low, and Welles, who actually was tall, seems to dominate his surroundings. By the end of the film, Kane, an old man who has lost much of his influence, is still photographed from low angles, but now the huge spaces of the rooms and halls of Xanadu dominate him and he seems small by comparison. The narrative undercuts the conventional understanding of low-angle perspectives.

Viewer Placement

In film, the viewer identifies with the camera. When the camera moves either in a tracking shot or through cutting, the viewer experiences the sensation of movement as well and frequently finds the images onscreen more real than the space in the movie theater. Psychologists call this illusion transference. Though it’s not often acknowledged, one reason for varying the viewing angle is for the physical excitement of transference, a viewing experience common in film. Viewer placement doesn’t necessarily require elaborate camera moves and wide vistas to produce an effect; a sequence in a cramped diner can be as evocative as one set in a vast forest if the camera angles are chosen judiciously. Since transference implicates the viewer in any camera movement or change of angles in an edited sequence, the viewer becomes part of the choreography. Complex sequences may very well provide an experience as rhythmically and spatially inventive as a dance, dependent largely on the arrangement of camera angles and perspective.

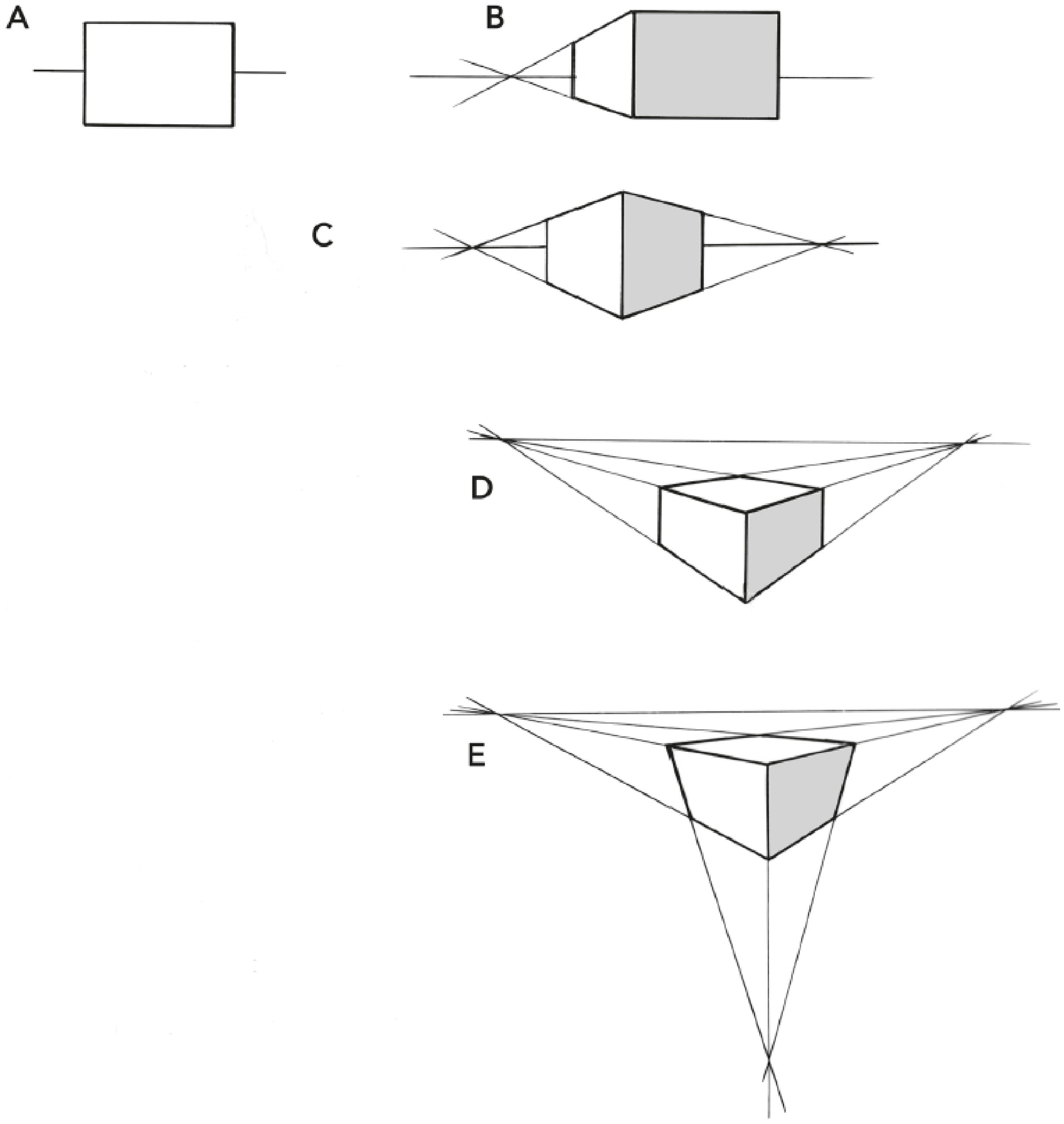


Figure 14.1

Linear Perspective

Whether we’re looking at a room, a building, or a densely wooded forest, certain viewpoints will emphasize depth and volume more than others will.

The five cubes in Figure 14.1 illustrate how linear perspective is used to create the illusion of depth. Cube A is viewed head on. This type of rendering is called the orthographic view, and does not attempt to show perspective. Cube B is turned slightly so that an additional surface is exposed. This surface is foreshortened and the top and bottom lines converge at the horizon. This is called one-point perspective. Cube C is shown in two-point perspective. Cube D is turned so that now there are two foreshortened sides. This makes the perception of depth even more pronounced. Cube E is drawn in three-point perspective. This picture reveals the greatest sense of depth.

One way to learn how the change in perspective works from shot to shot in a sequence is to reduce perspective to simple forms. Once the basic forms are understood you will be able to recognize them more easily when you are devising sequences.

Perspective

Every storyboard artist and production designer has a solid grasp of the principles of perspective and uses them frequently to visualize sets and camera angles. When composing a storyboard, a knowledge of perspective frees the artist to imagine different viewpoints in a real location, or to create a location that is entirely imaginary. This type of representation is called linear perspective and is just one of many drawing systems, none more valid than any other, though it conforms fairly closely to our way of seeing the world. Linear perspective has been the predominant way of creating the illusion of space in representational drawings since the Renaissance.

But when a filmmaker places two shots side by side the interaction between the images produces an entirely new type of spatial experience that can best be described as sequential perspective. This is how he creates the type of cinematic choreography that includes the viewer in the space on the screen, a major factor in the design of shot flow.

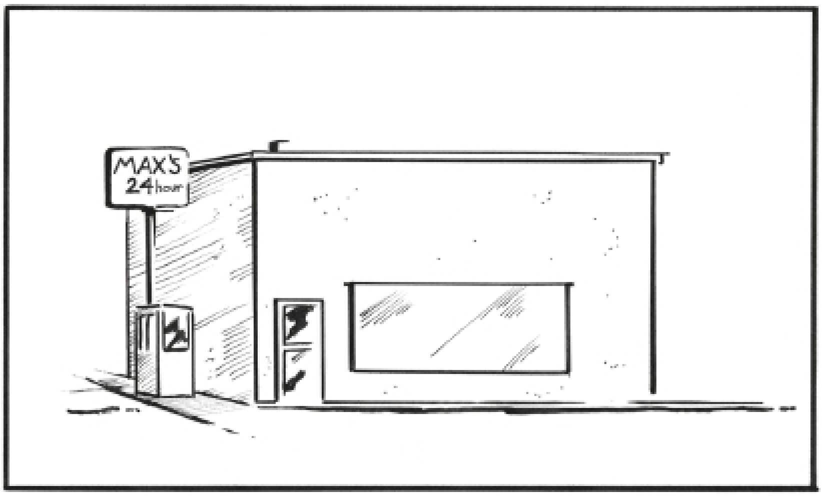
To better understand the effect of a series of camera angles we can look at the subject in traditional terms, as the study of perspective. The cube illustrations in Figure 14.1 show the basic forms.

Now let's take the various views of the cube and use them as the basis of a location in a storyboard. A convenience store can be modeled on the cube, with a big sign on a tall post separate from the building. Figure 14.2 shows the store in one-, two-, and three-point perspective.

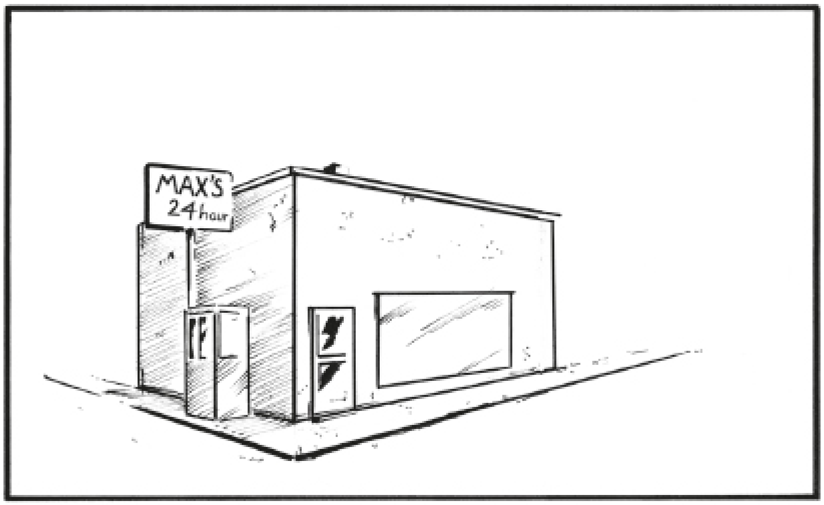
Now let's look at four versions of sequential perspective in storyboard form. The action is simple: A man drives up to the convenience store to find a phone. He goes to the door but then sees that there is a phone booth alongside the building. He walks to the booth and makes a phone call.

The purpose of the following examples is to illustrate shot flow as a rhythmic variation of angles. In the continuity style, this means establishing the volume of a given space by moving through that space. Where there is motion, there is acceleration, velocity, and inertia, and continuity editing can establish its own physical laws. This type of "shot ballistics" is most pronounced in the kind of dynamic views that follow.

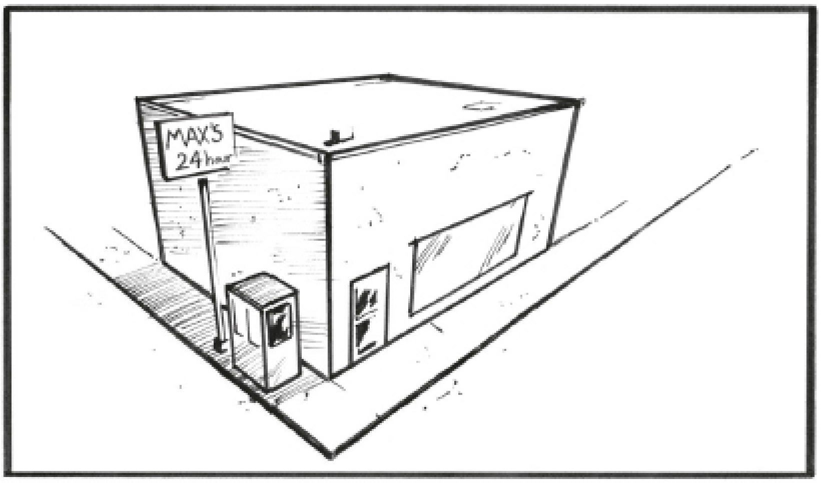
Figure 14.2



One-point perspective.

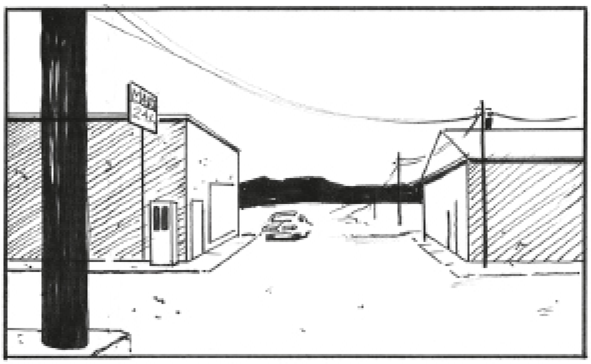

MAX'S
24 hour

Two-point perspective.

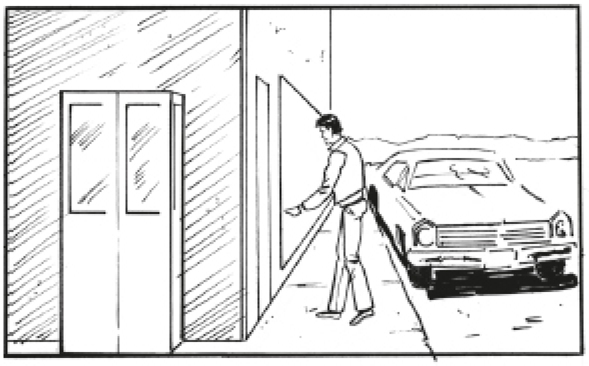

MAX'S
24 hour

Tree-point perspective.

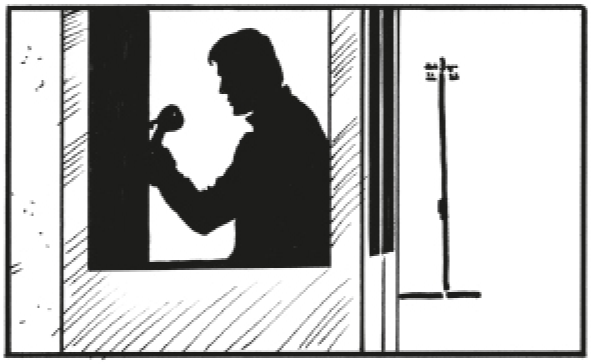
1



2



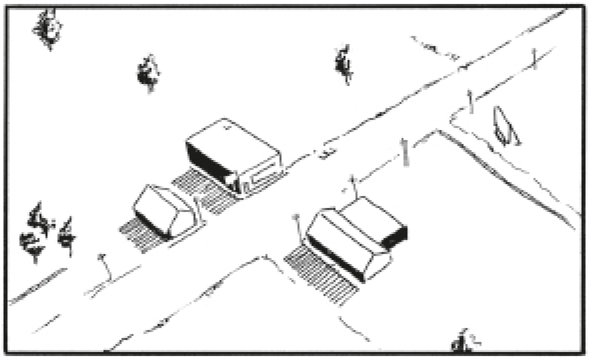
3



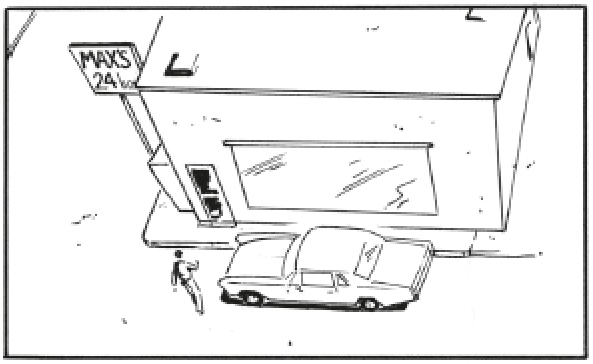
Eye-Level View

In this first version, I've used straight-on eye-level views. Opening frame 1 uses the flatness of the buildings to reinforce the effect of the road reaching into the distance. Eye-level views tend to be stable and can serve as a contrast to dynamic compositions. Compare these eye-level views with the more angular compositions in the next series.

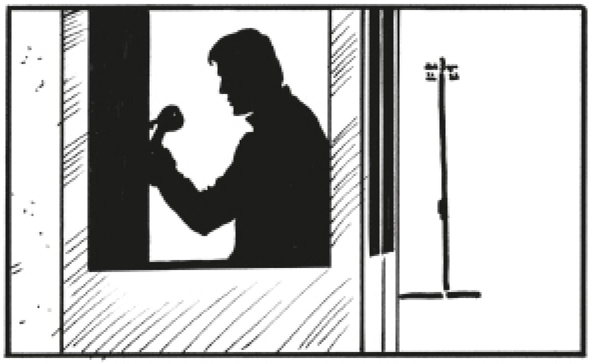
1



2



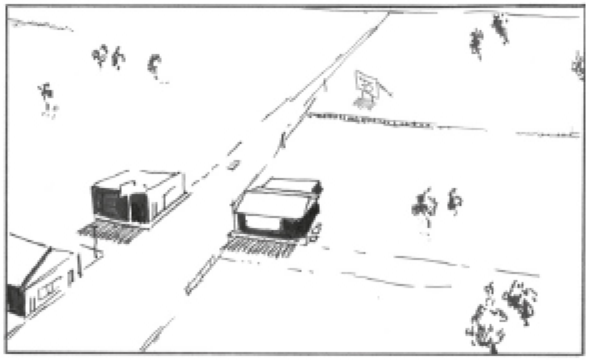
3



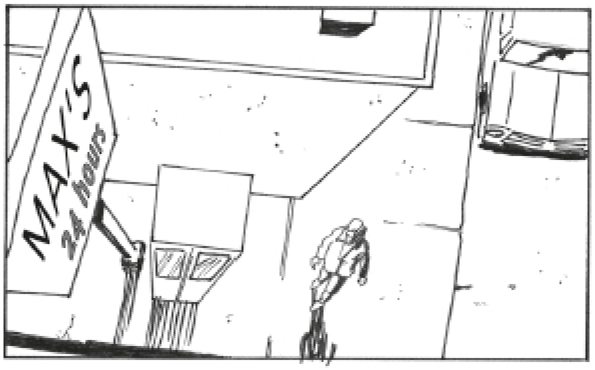
High-Angle View 1

Notice that these three shots proceed in a generally smooth movement. First, the degree of perspective increases in each frame: Frame 1 has one foreshortened plane, frame 2 has two foreshortened planes, and frame 3 shows all three planes receding so that the depth of the shot increases as we go along. Second, the shots become tighter as we move to the phone booth. This creates a sense of forward motion. This type of shot flow is progressive.

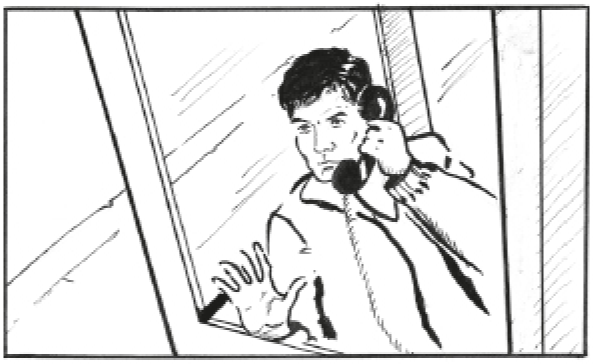
1



2



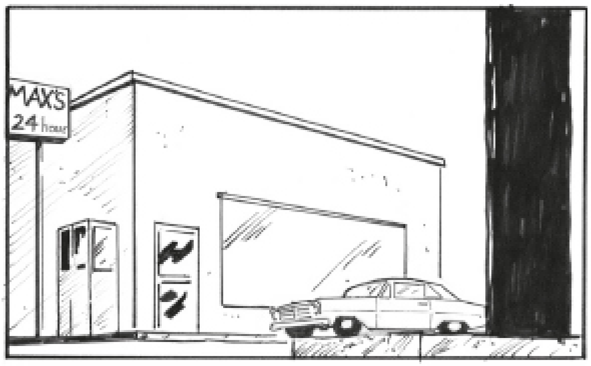
3



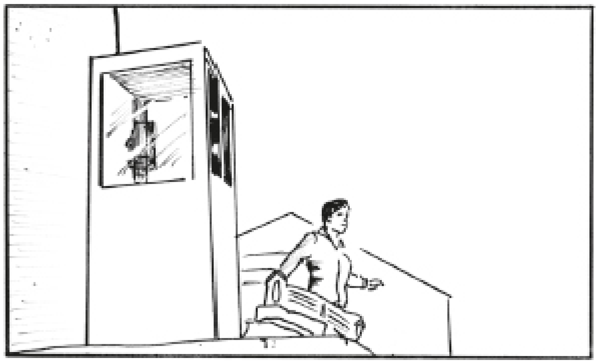
High-Angle View 2

This next series is nonprogressive. This means that the angular view in one frame conflicts with the view in the following frame. The degree and direction of the conflict is varied but is most pronounced between the last two frames.

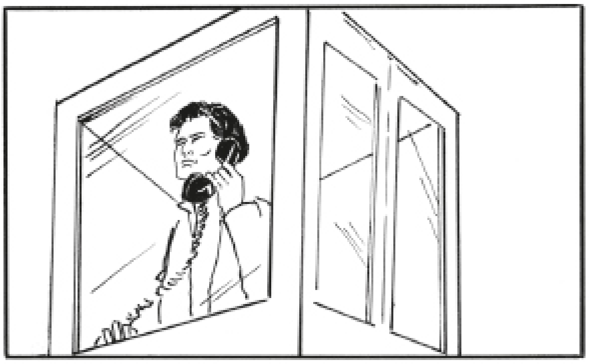
1



2



3



Low-Angle View

This is another example of conflicting frames. The contrast here is slight until the last two frames. Compare this will the eye-level views, which keep the same general distance from the subject as this series but are far less dynamic.

Space vs. Subject

One way of looking at camera angles and how they depict the scene space is to create the storyboard without the subject and just concentrate on the background. This was my approach in the convenience store storyboards. In visualizing that sequence, I drew many sketches and cut them out so that they could be rearranged easily on my drafting table. Each time the drawings were put in a new order, I could imagine a different version of the scene. Any change in viewpoint suggested subtle changes in mood, pacing, and even the narrative events of the scene.

This is worth remembering when you are devising sequences. In the same way that we substituted the spatial concept of the circle of action for the subject-oriented patterns for staging, we can frame shots based on the location rather than the subject. Ultimately, the subject will become the determining factor, but by that time, many new ideas may have been discovered.

Recent Trends in Perspective Rendering

The way interiors are shot has changed over the last 25 years. Location shooting has slowly replaced studio sets not only for economic reasons but also because of the strong trend toward realism that studio sets have difficulty matching. Without the removable walls and ceilings of a studio set, wide-angle lenses must be used in the often-cramped quarters of a real interior so that full-figure shots can be framed. Often, filmmakers choose lenses to solve these problems, and pictorial considerations become secondary.

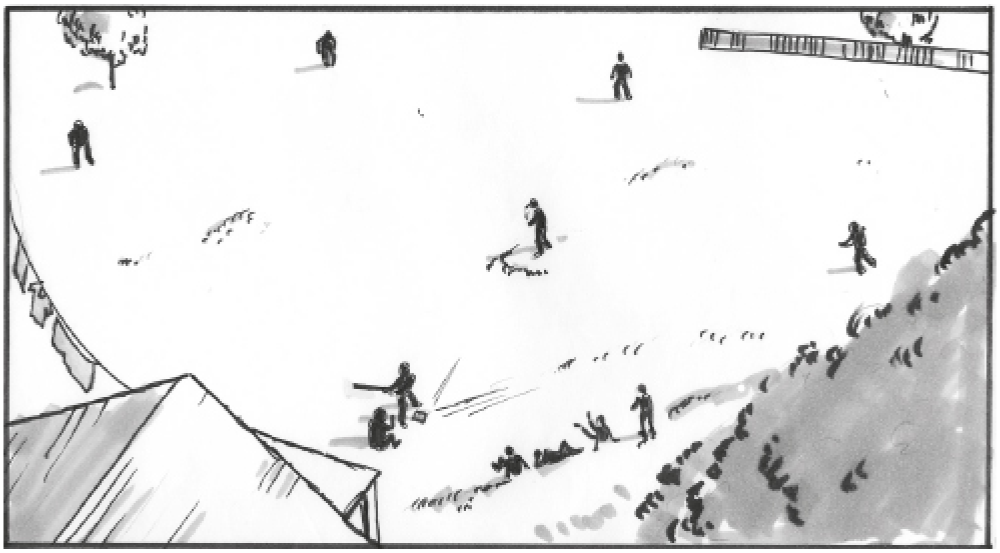
If you find yourself in an interior where the perspective of the wide-angle shot is determined by the size of the room rather than by design, try using a longer lens. Shooting through doorways and windows and past foreground objects instead of trying to find a clear frame in a room are some of the ways of utilizing a longer lens. The wide-angle interior shot is a staple of television, and since it reflects a budgetary choice rather than an artistic decision, new ideas might arise from bucking the cliché.

We can now look at a narrative situation that permits a wide combination of angles and lenses: the action sequence.

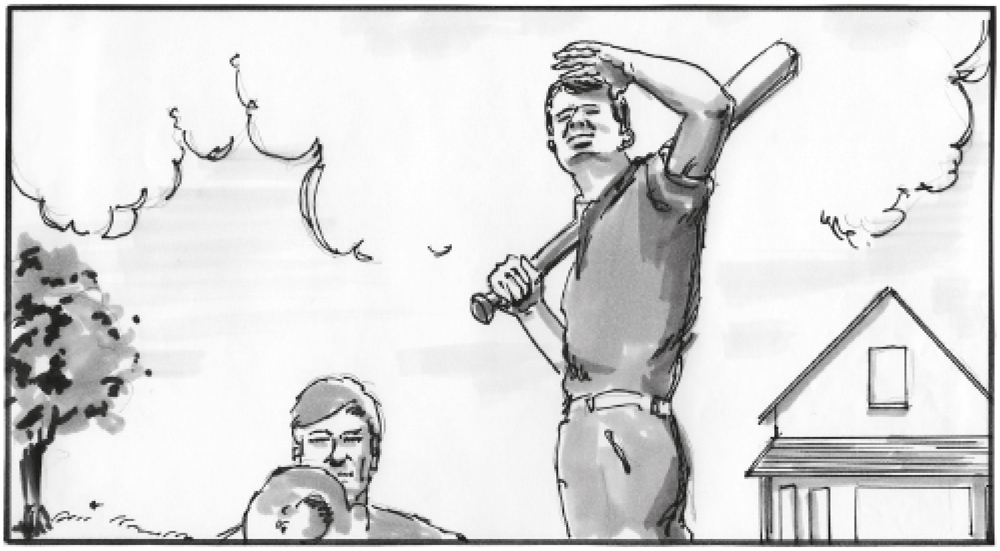
Narrative Problem (Camera Angles in Action)

The following action sequence features a backlot baseball game. The treatment is humorous and somewhat stylized, which for our purposes encourages the use of vigorous camera angles.

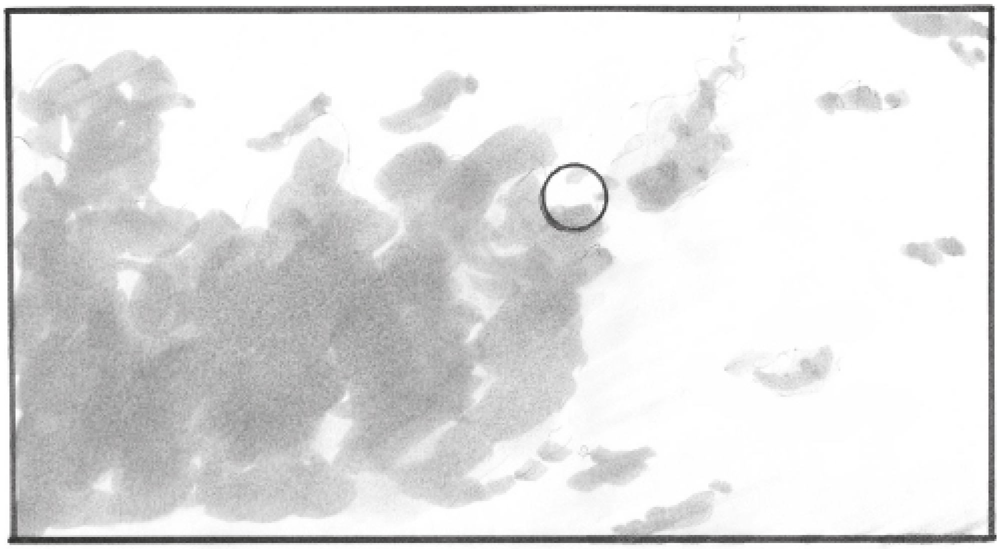
The storyboard begins on a blustery late afternoon with broken clouds and a bright sun. A batter is at the plate. The count is 3 balls and 2 strikes. The sunlight shines into the batter's eyes, and he has difficulty seeing. Fortunately, a few patchy clouds move in, blocking the sun momentarily and giving the batter a break, but the pitcher stalls by adjusting the laces on his sneaker until the sun reemerges.



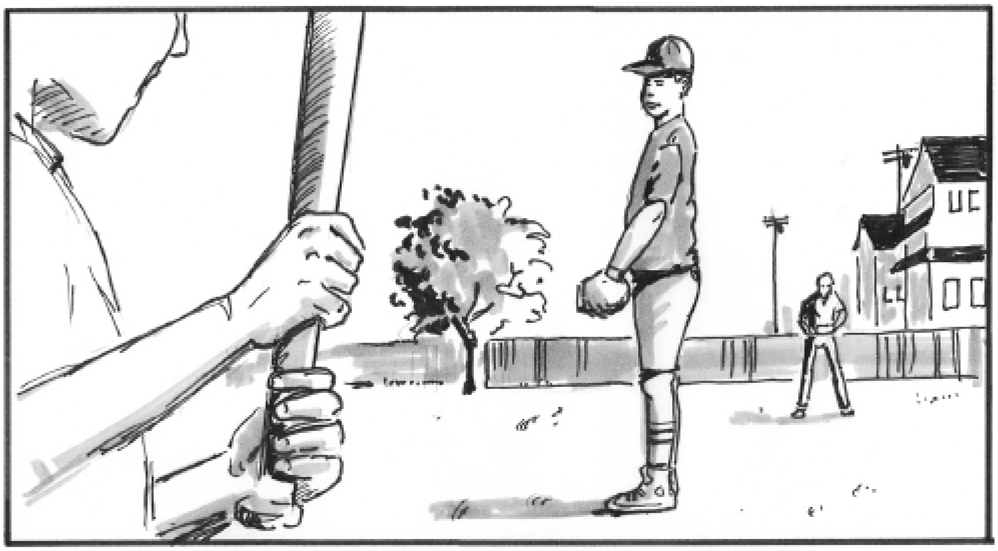
1. The count is 3 balls and 2 strikes.



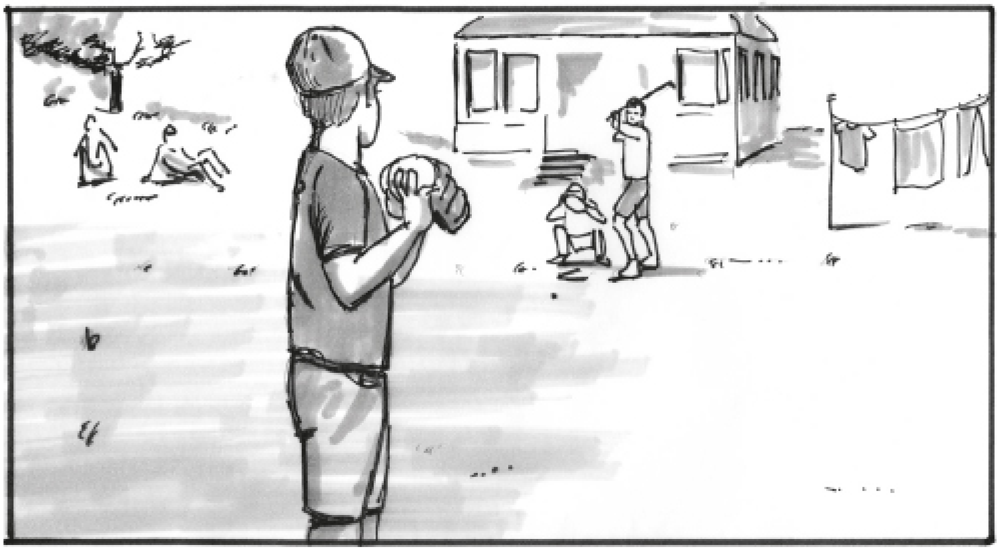
2. The sun makes the batter squint as he checks to see where the outfielders are standing.



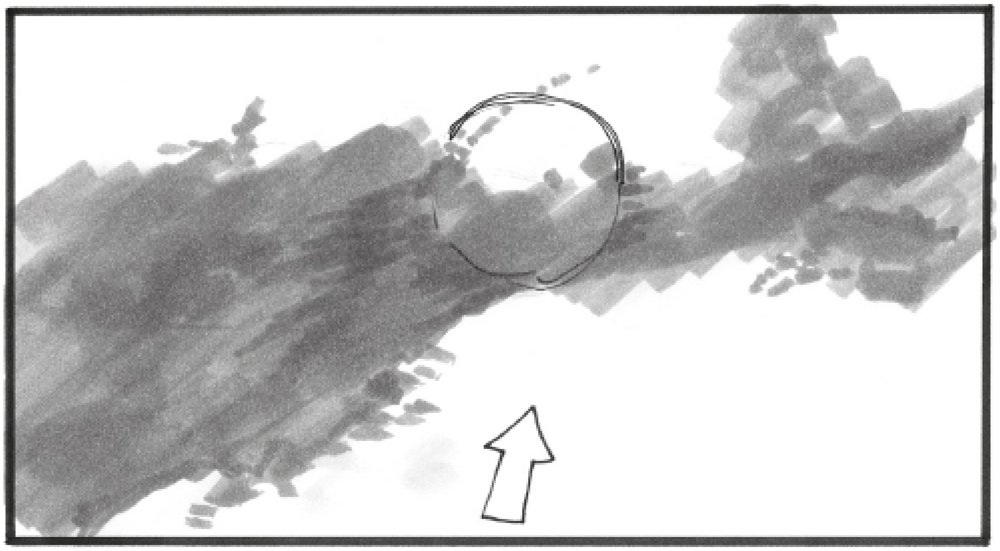
3. Batter's POV of the bright sun.



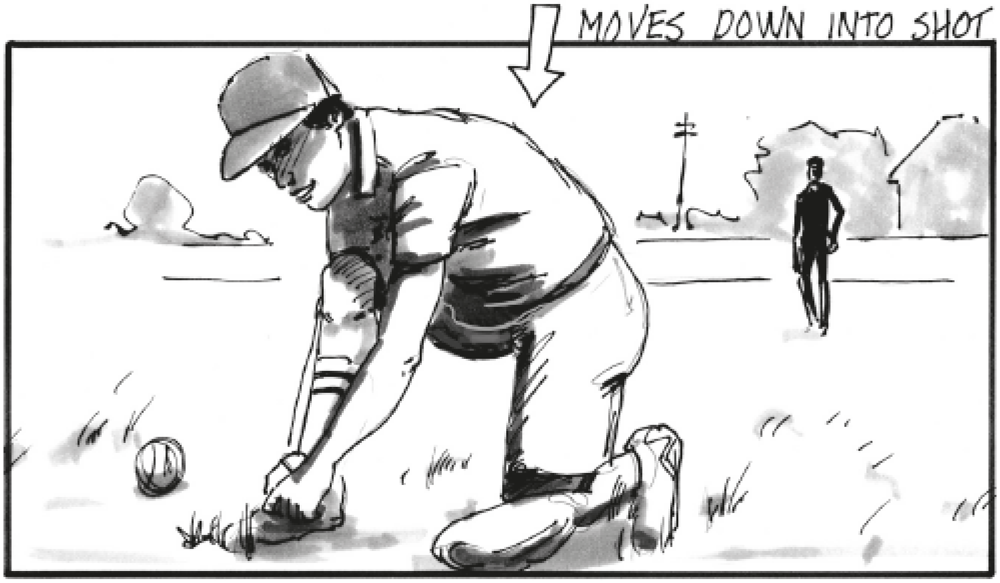
4. The pitcher starts his windup …



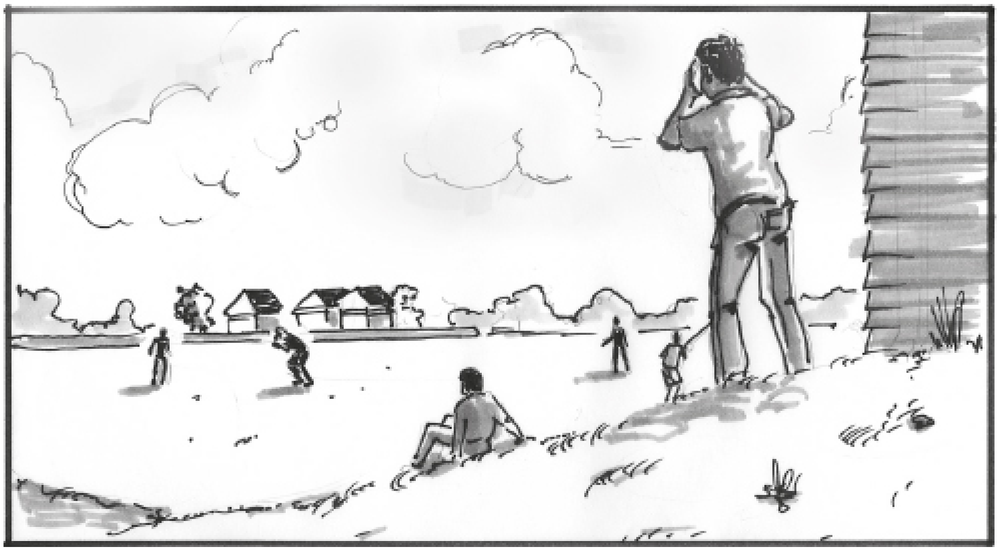
5. The pitcher is ready to throw when the field darkens.



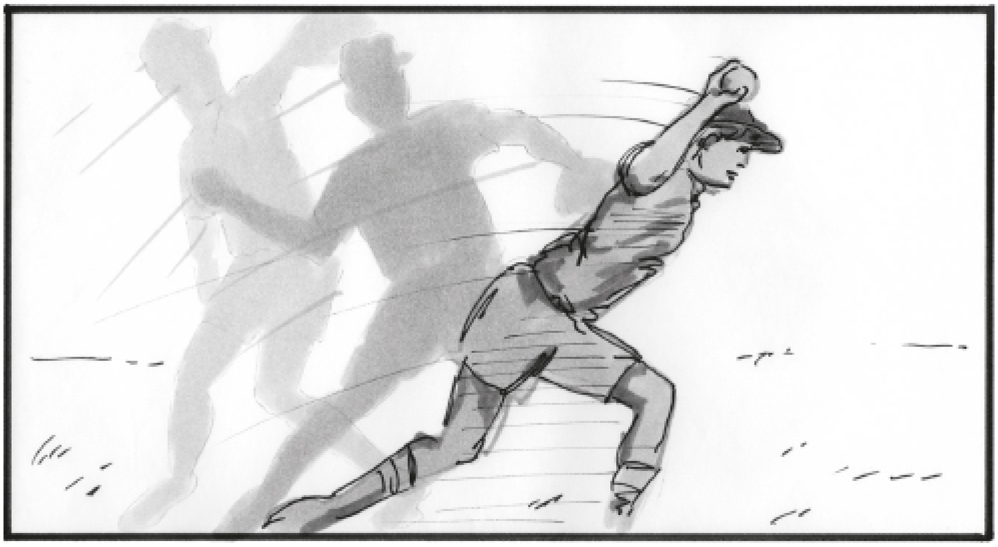
6. Clouds block the sun.


MOVES DOWN INTO SHOT

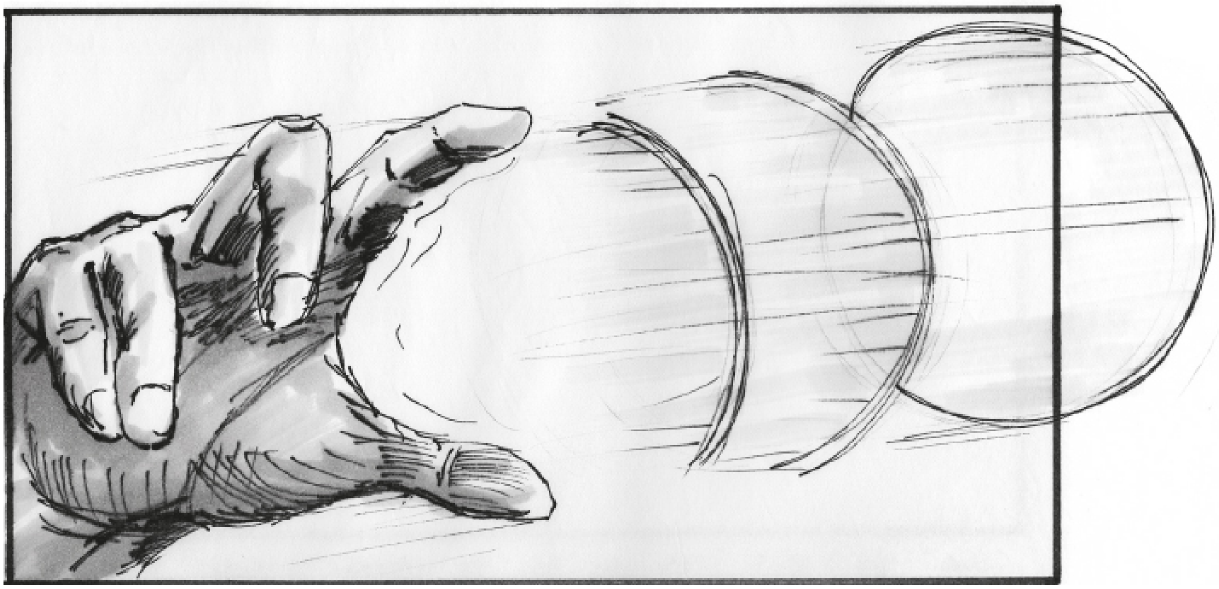
7. Not wanting to give the batter a break, the pitcher stalls by adjusting laces on his sneaker.



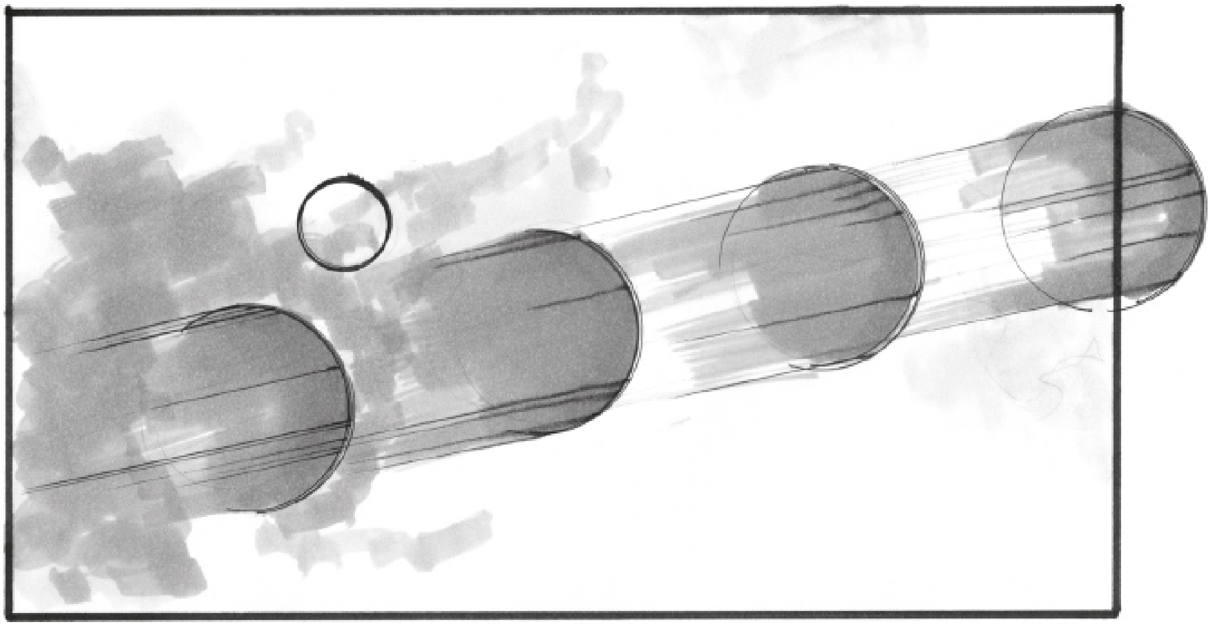
8. The pitcher stands when the sun returns. The team at bat jeers as the pitcher winds up and—



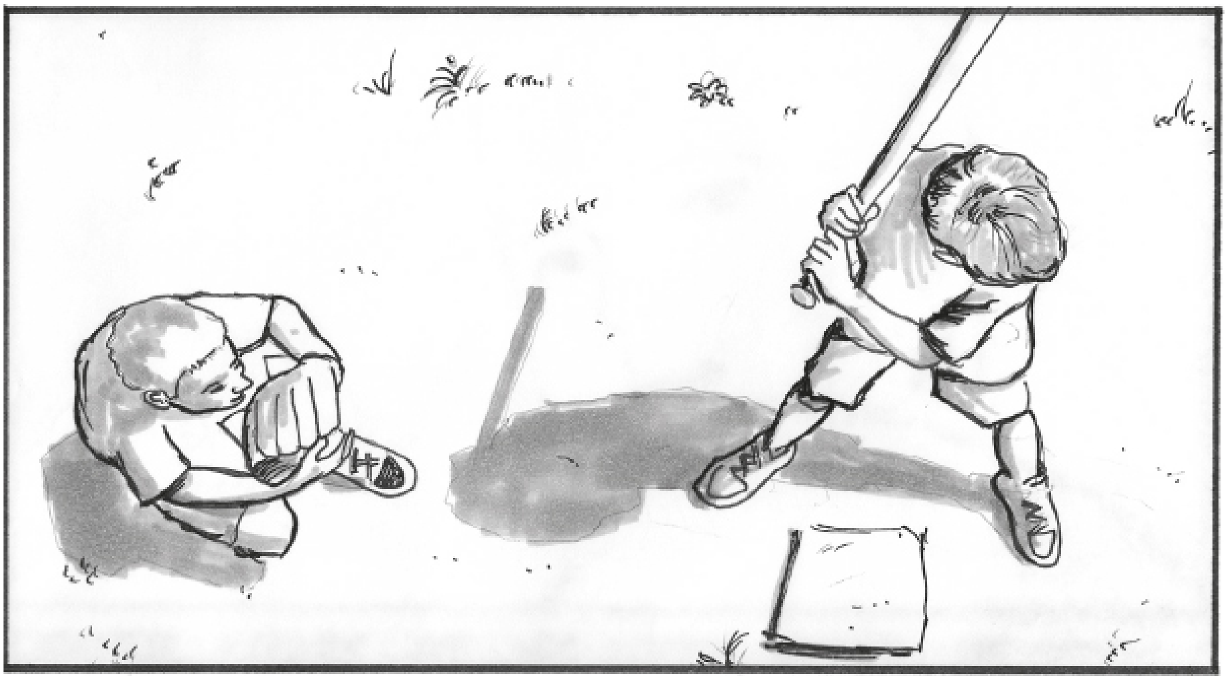
9. We go to slow motion for the pitch.



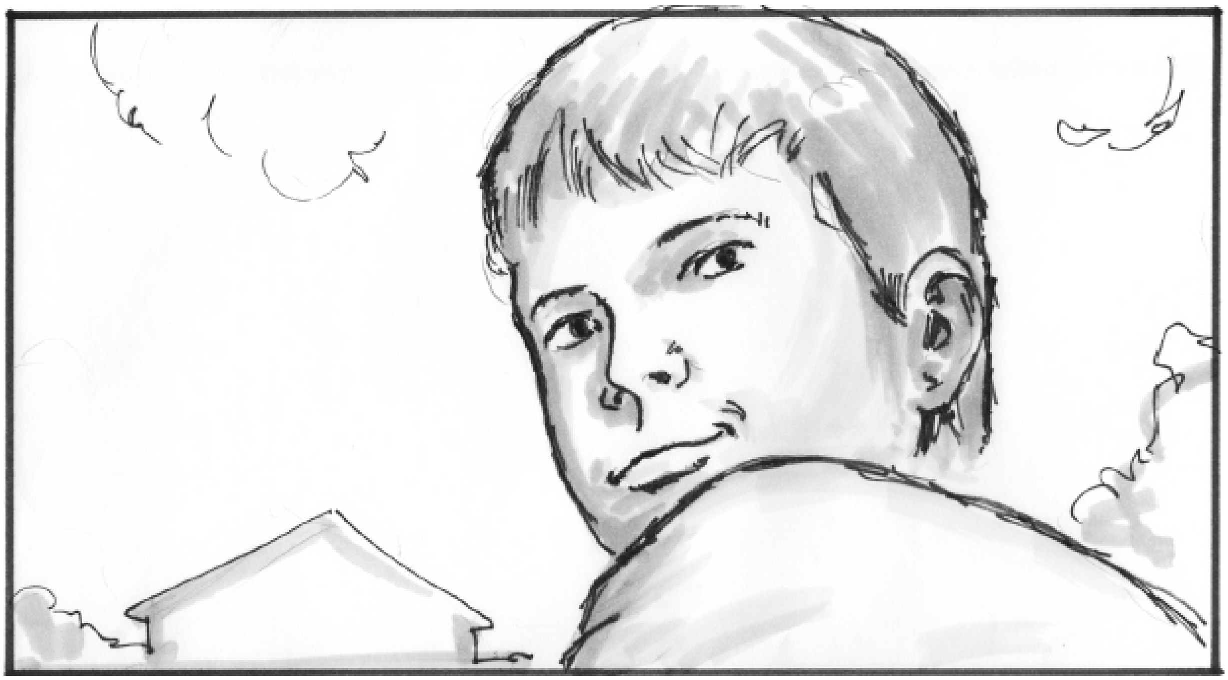
10. We stay in slow motion as the ball is released.



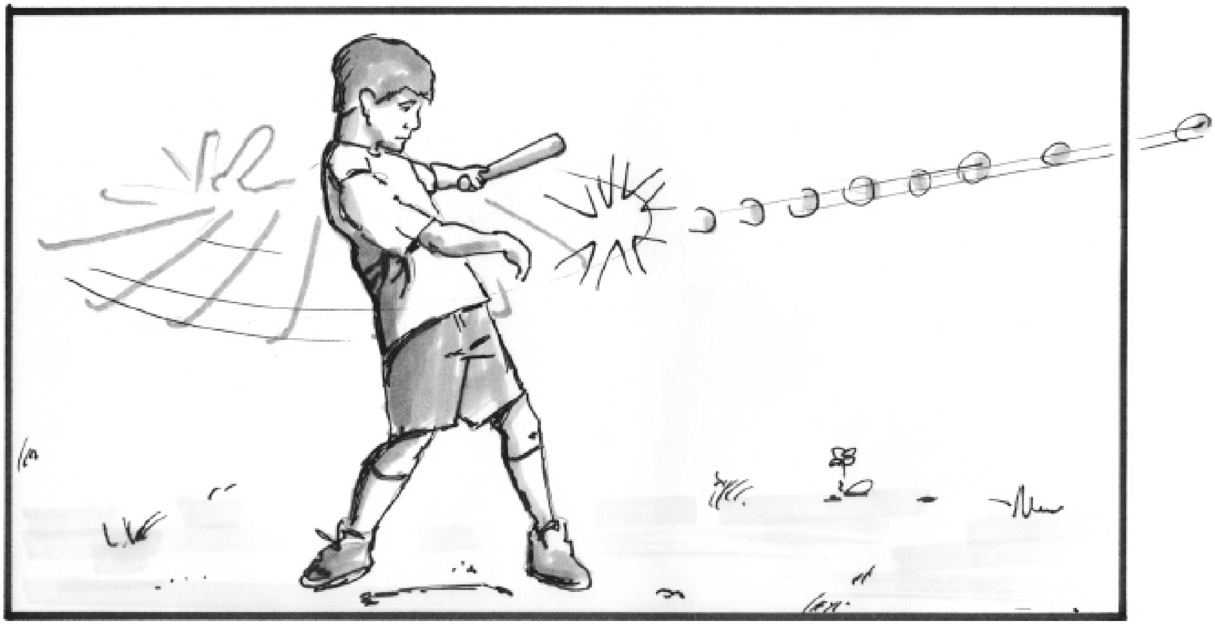
11. Camera points straight up as ball passes sun in slow motion and clouds move in to block light.



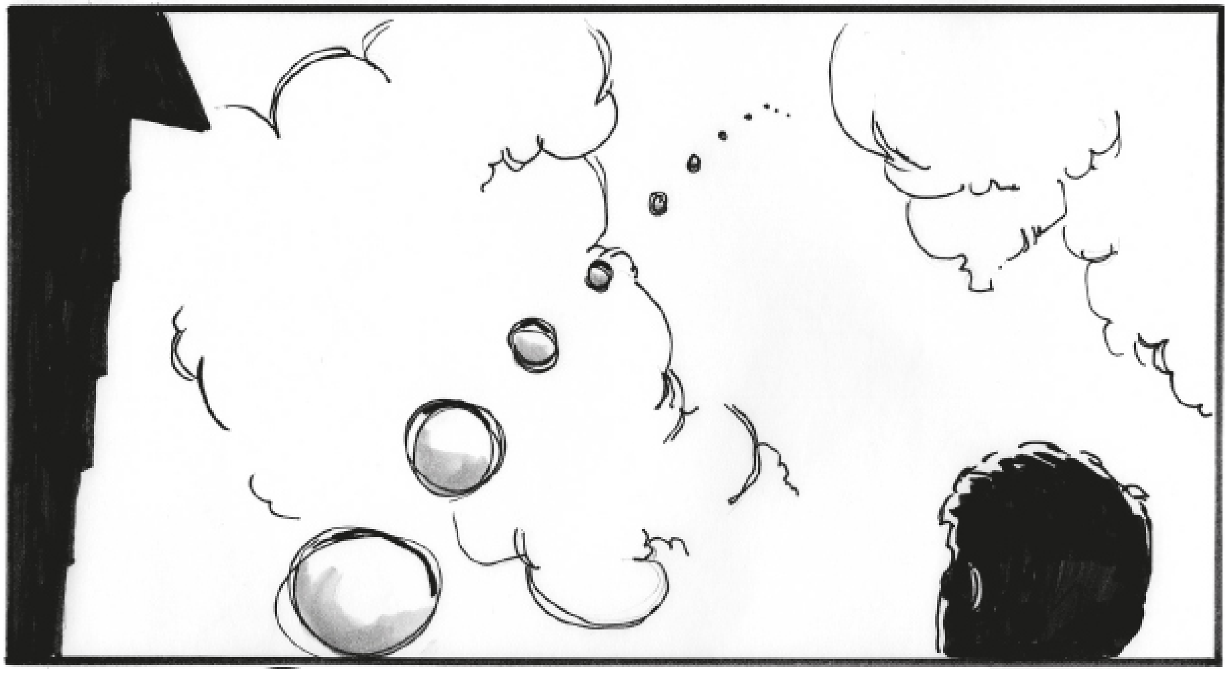
12. Shadows fade in slow motion.



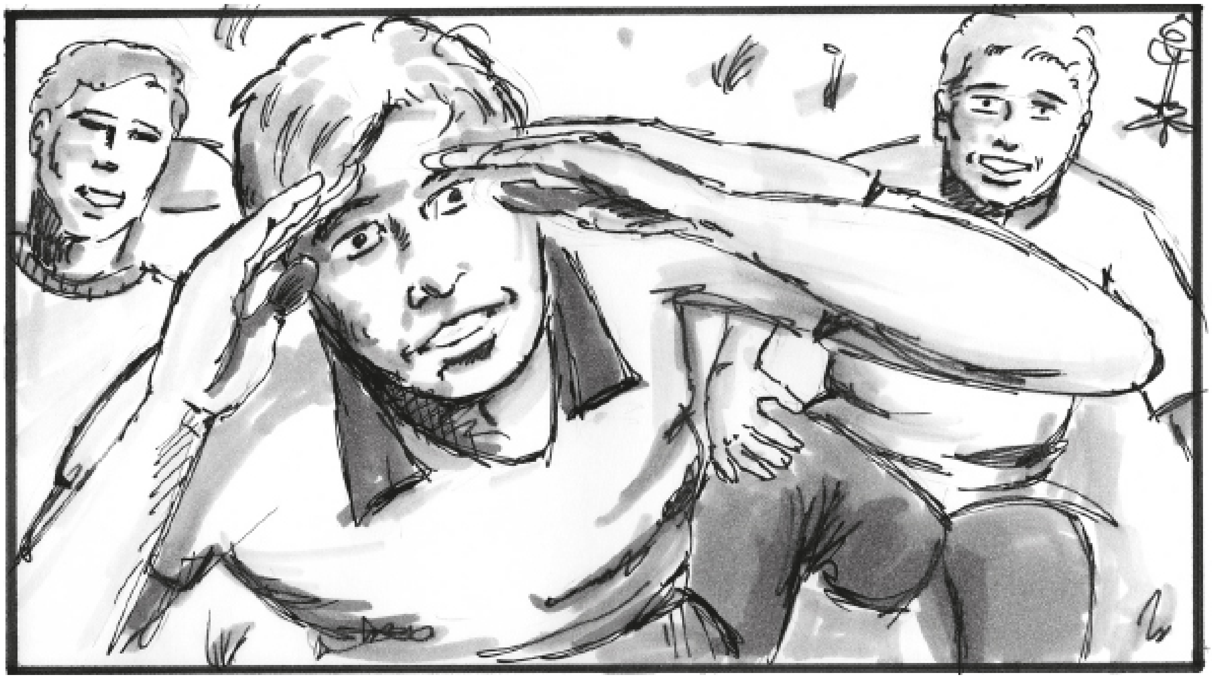
13. Batter smiles because of this lucky break. He sets himself for the swing.



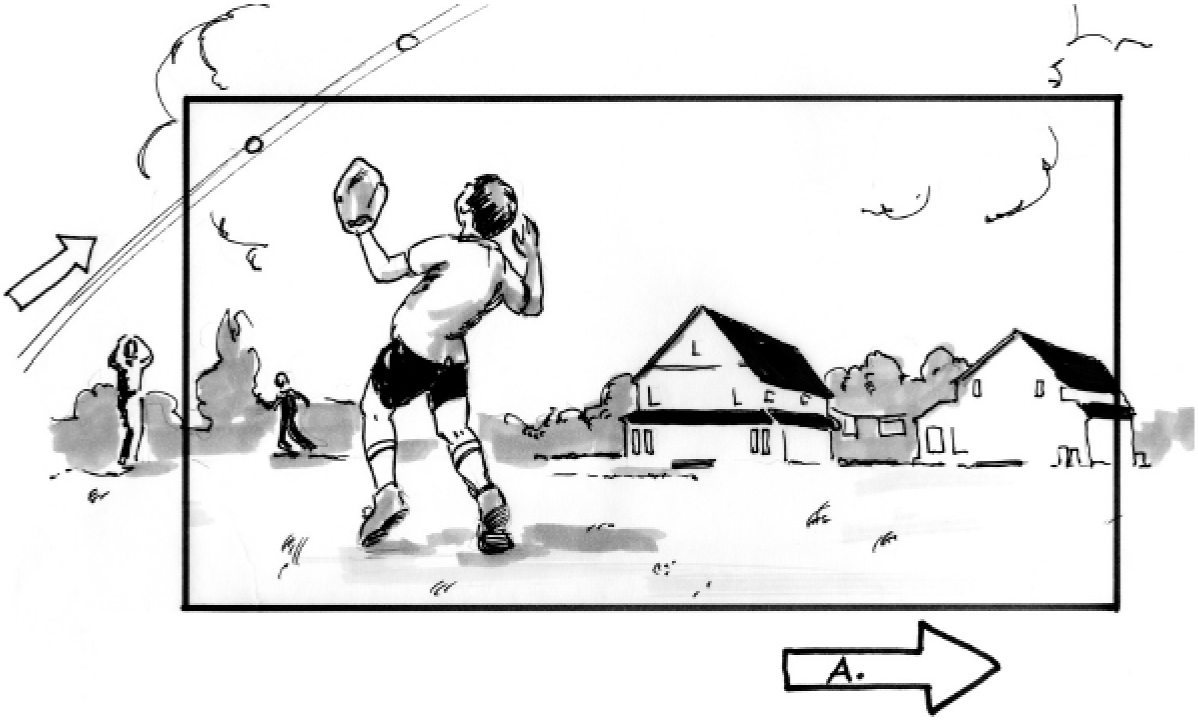
14. Crack! We return to normal camera speed as the batter connects with the ball.



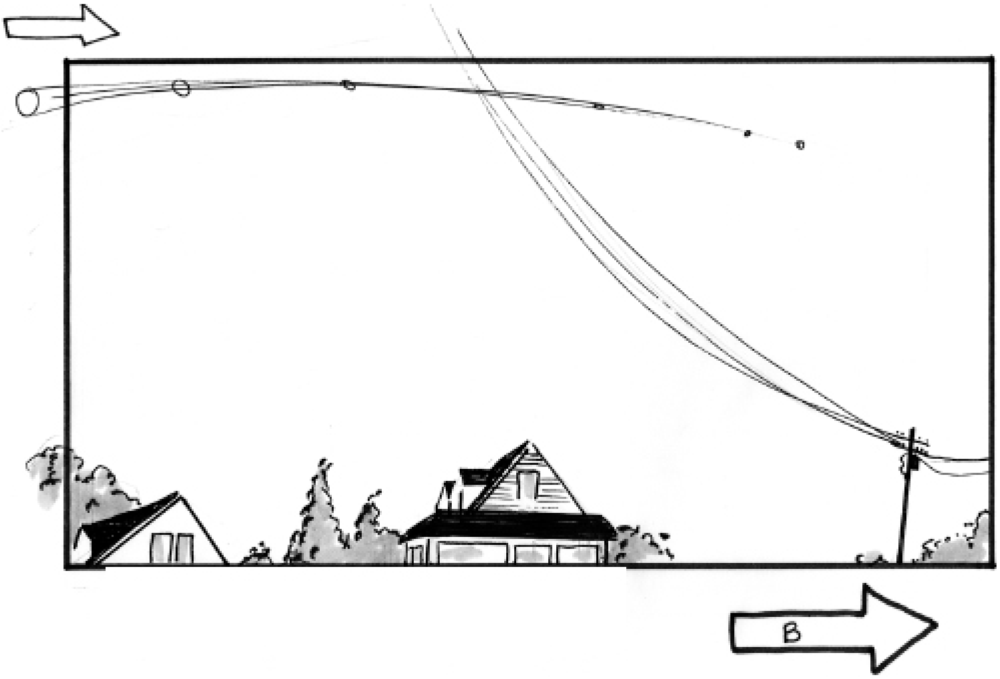
15. It’s a perfect hit.



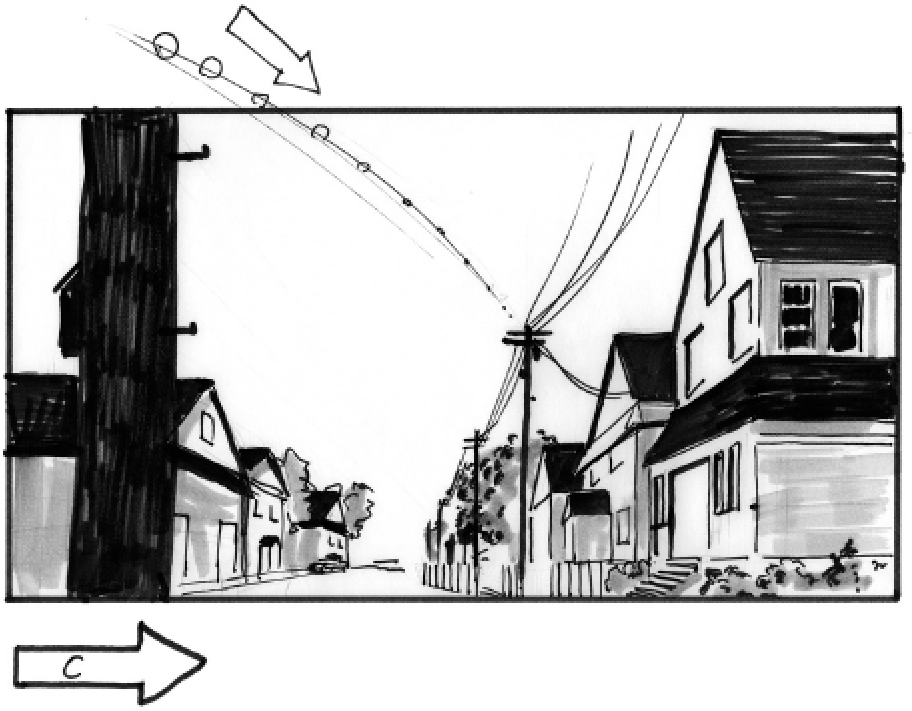
16. A kid seated on the hill jumps up to watch the ball climb into the sky. “Damn!”



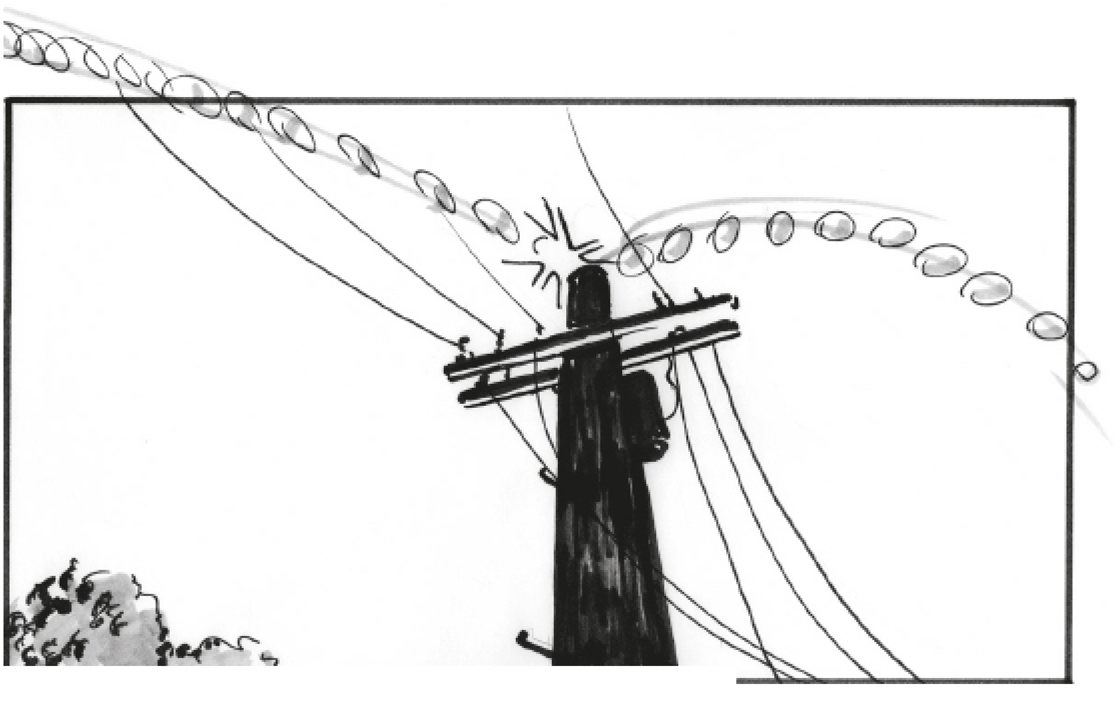
17. Camera pans through panels A, B, and C.



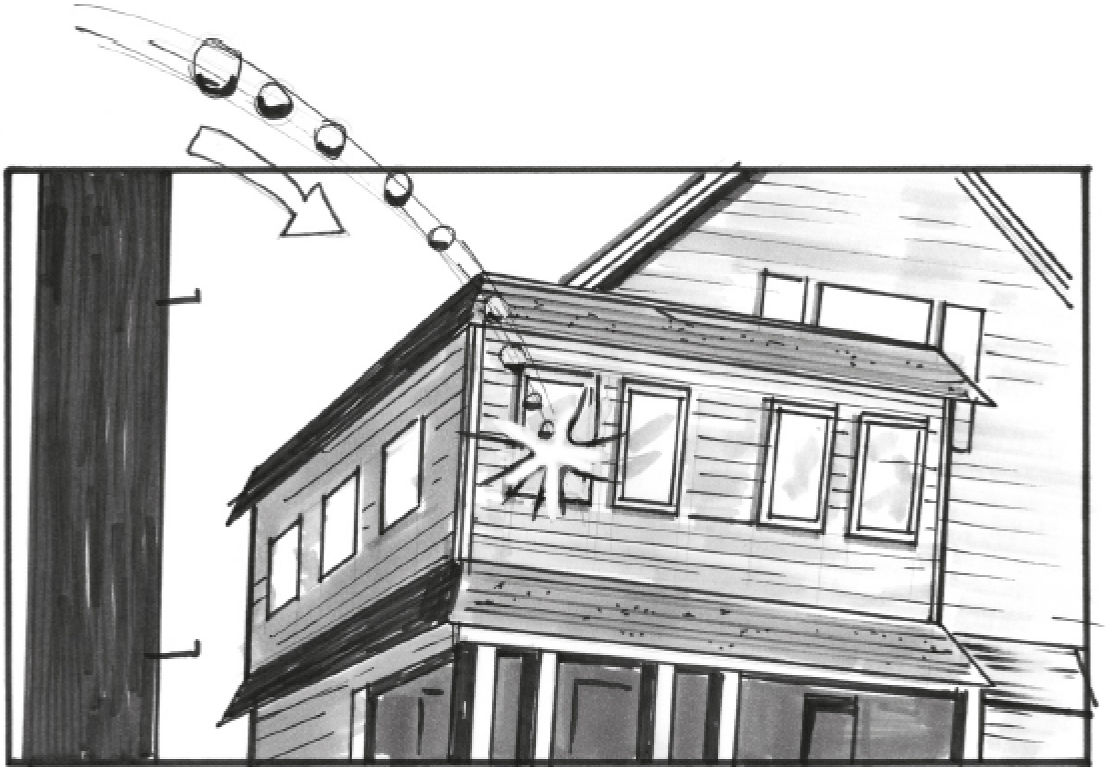
18. Continue pan shot following the ball.



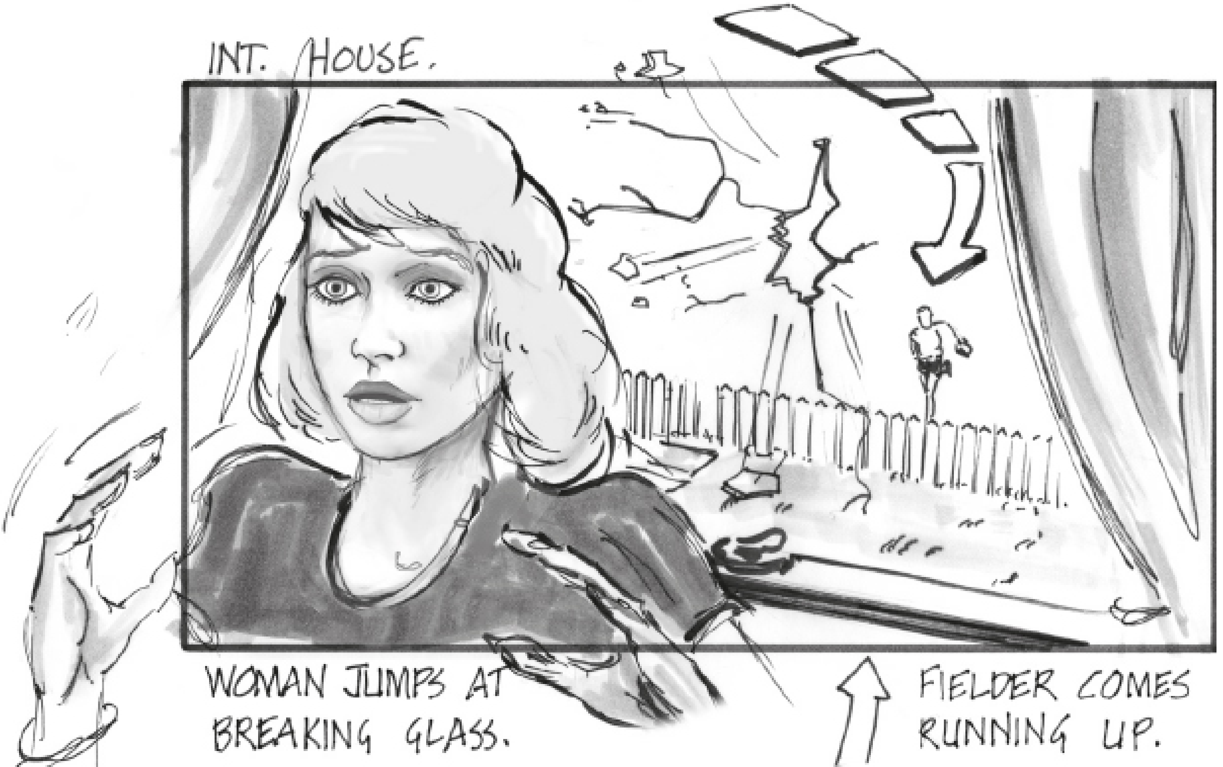
19. Pan ends as ball nears telephone pole.



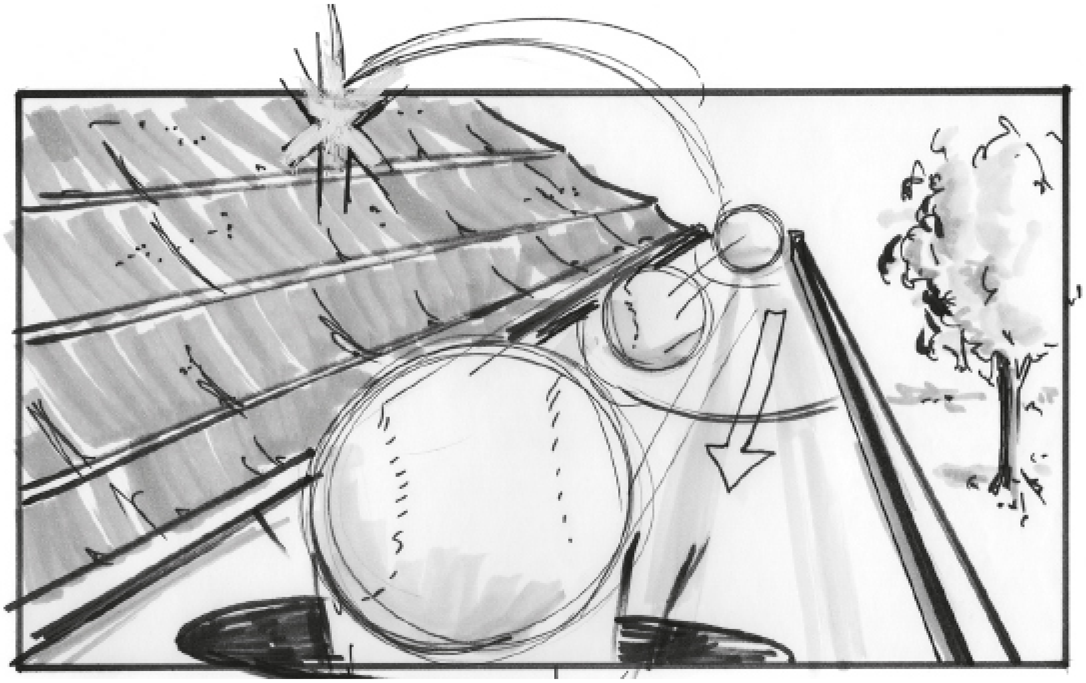
20. Ball bounces off the pole …



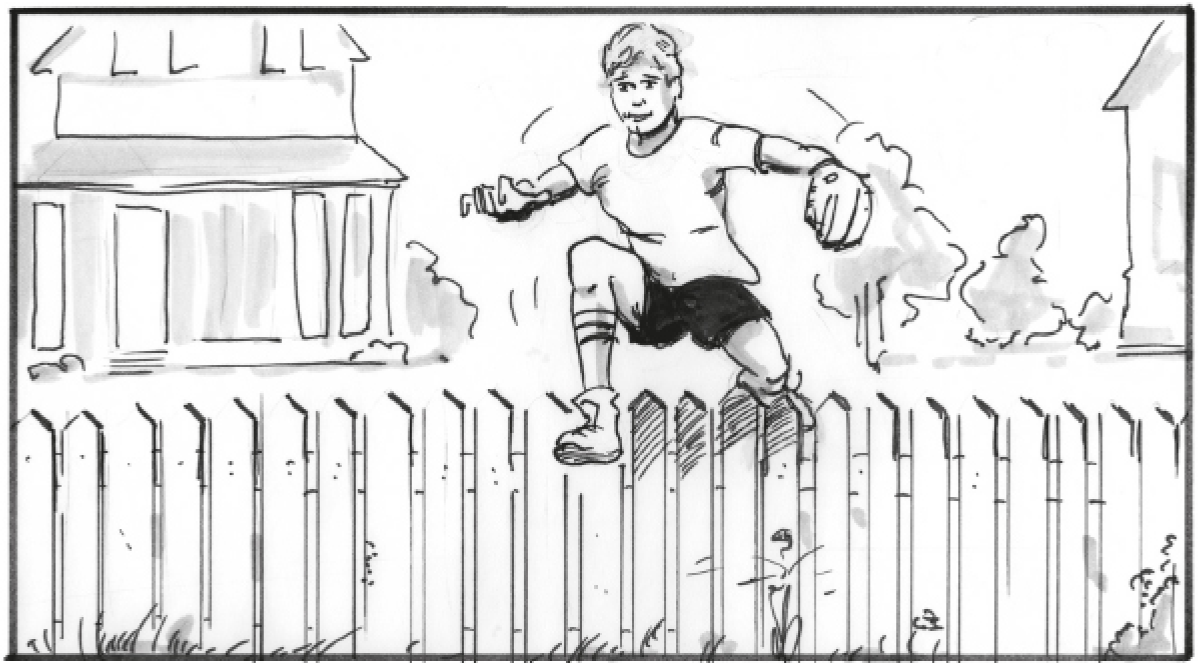
21. And right into the window of a nearby house.


INT. HOUSE.
WOMAN JUMPS AT BREAKING GLASS.
FIELDER COMES RUNNING UP.

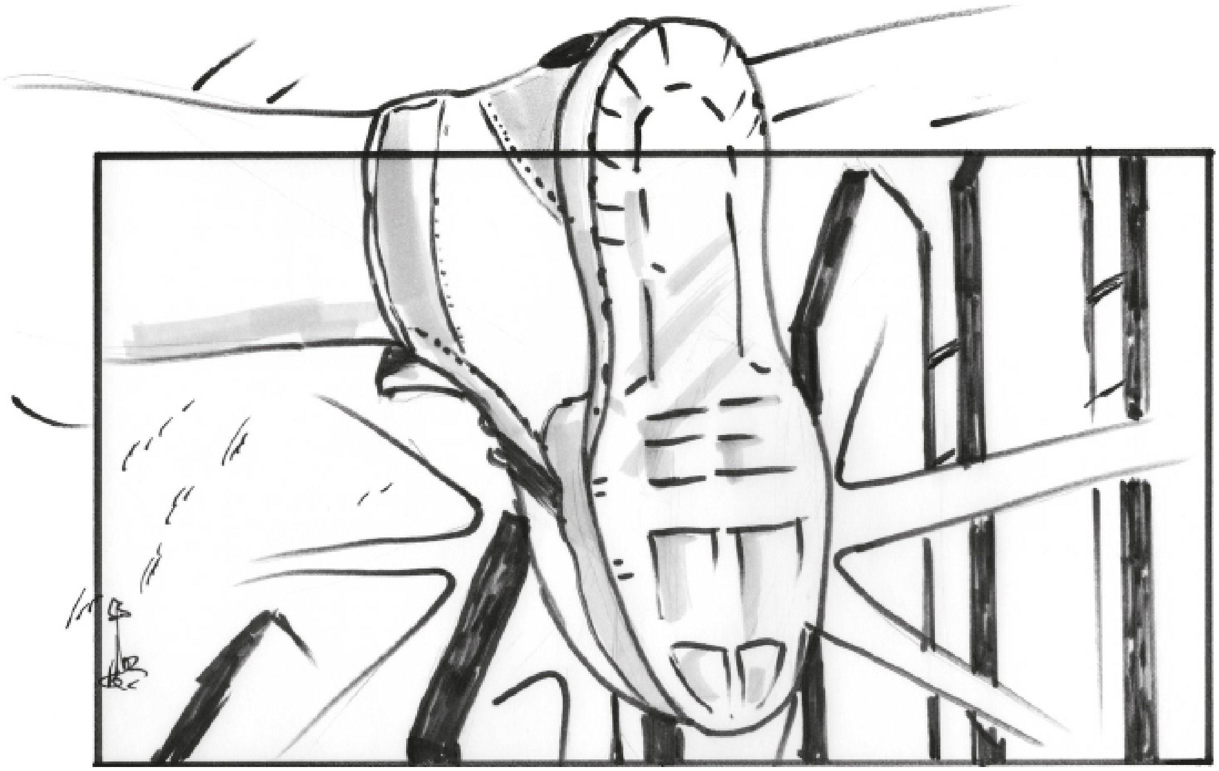
22. Woman in the house jumps as ball smashes the window. The fielder comes running up to find the ball.



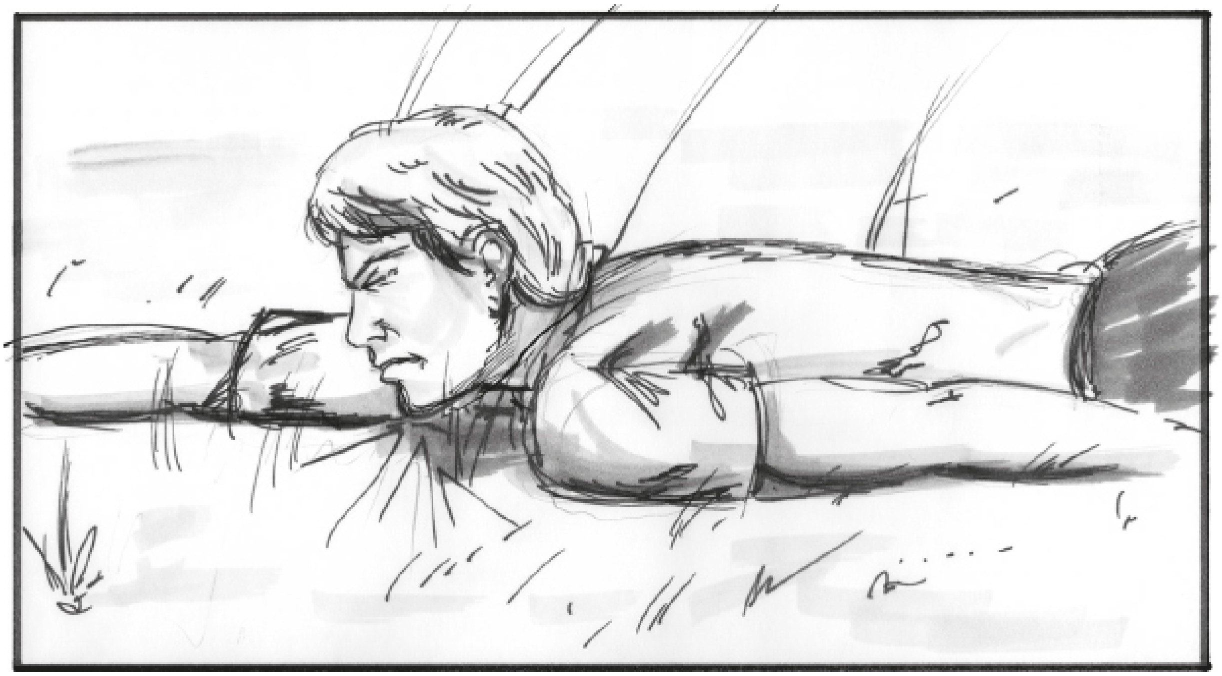
23. The ball bounces down the roof, rolls down the gutter, and into the drainpipe.



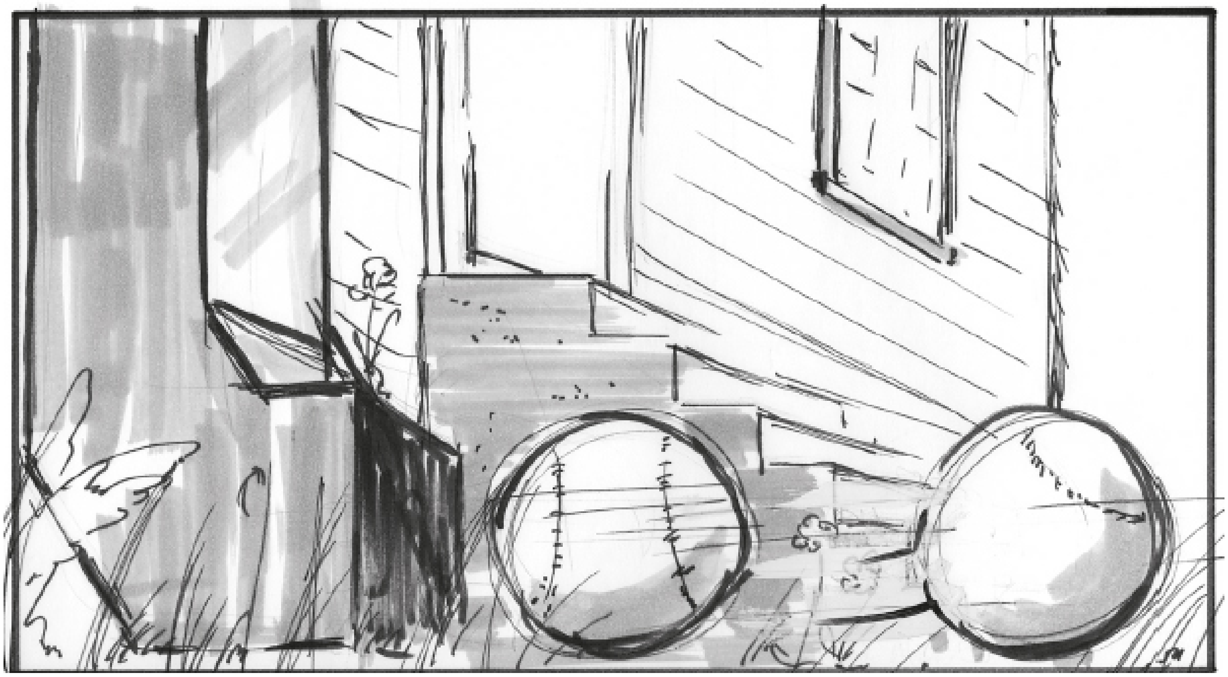
24. The fielder hurdles the front fence.



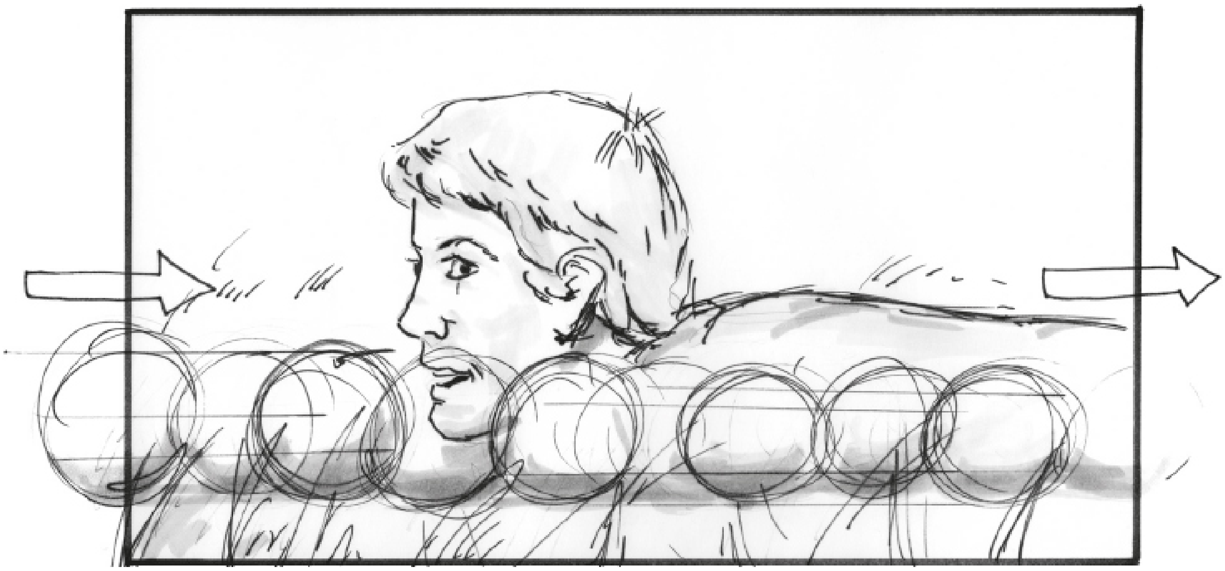
25. The fielder snags his foot on the fence.



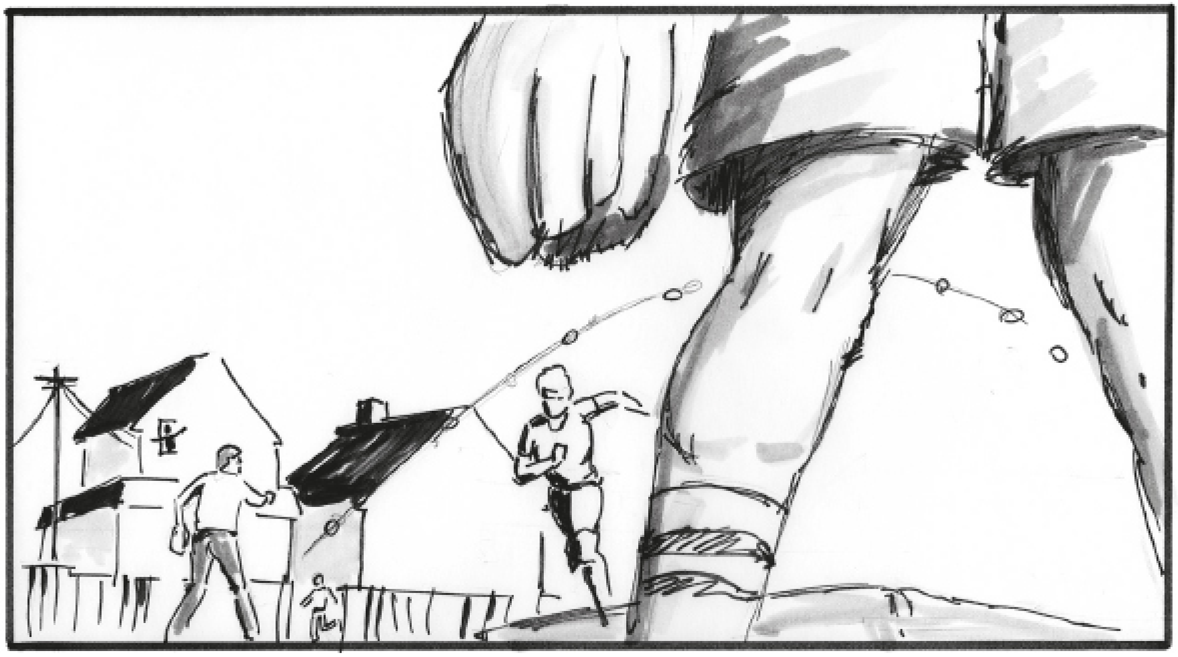
26. The fielder falls, landing with a thud.



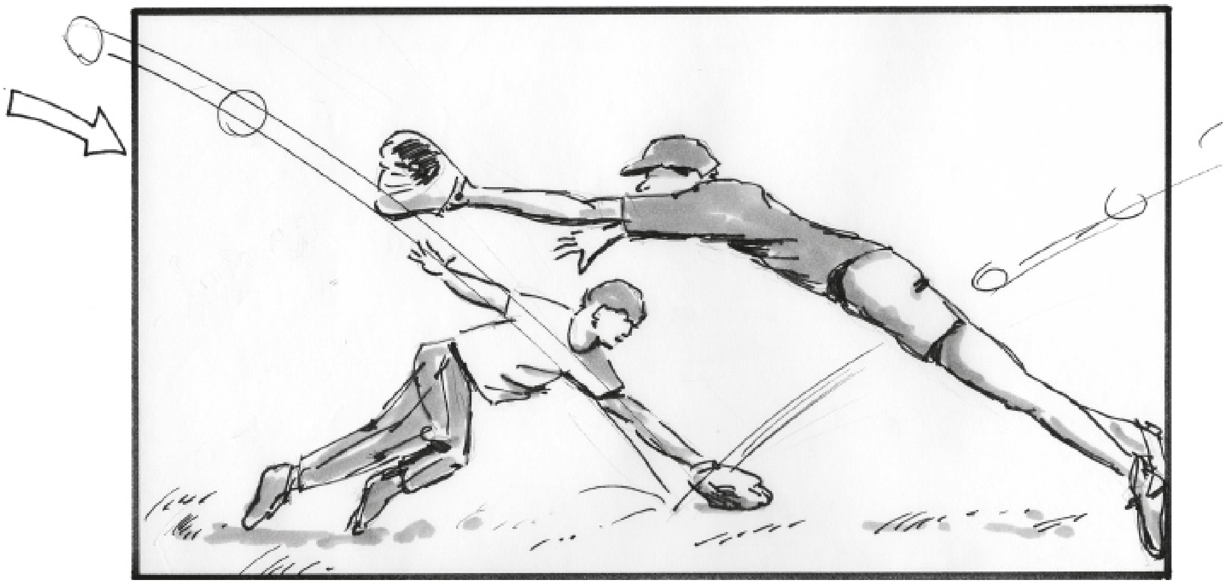
27. The ball shoots out of the drainpipe …



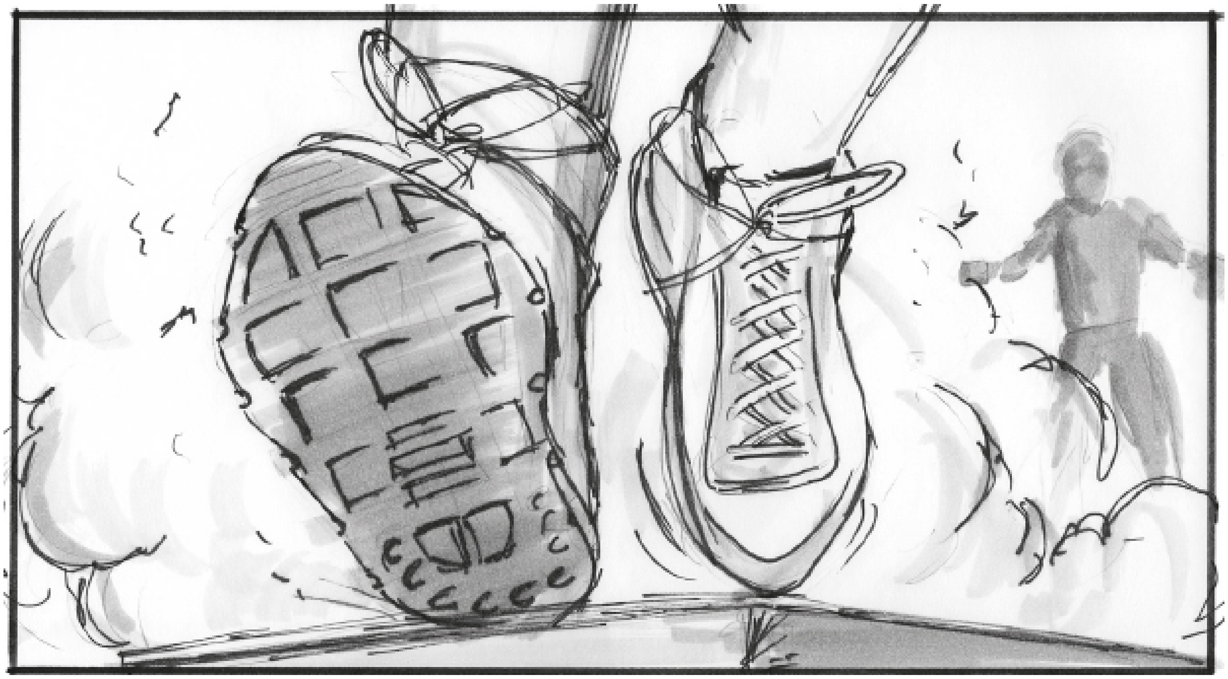
28. … and rolls right by the fielder.



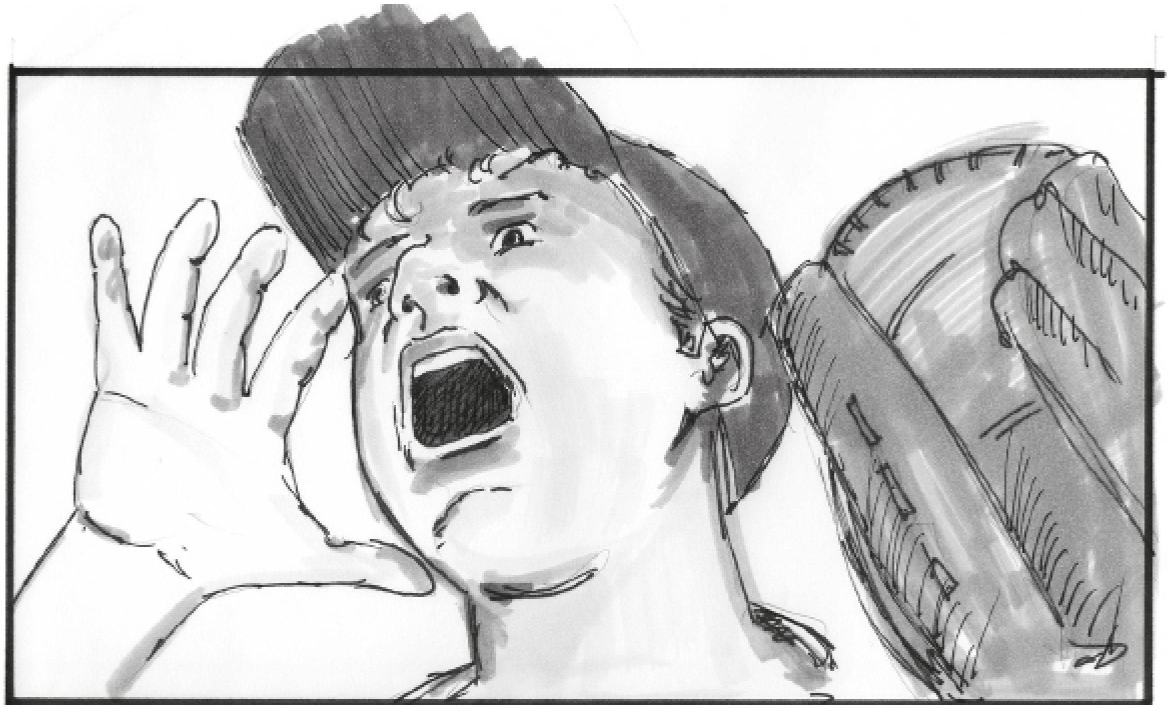
29. Back at the infield, the batter heads for third. The fielder appears in the background with the ball and throws it in.



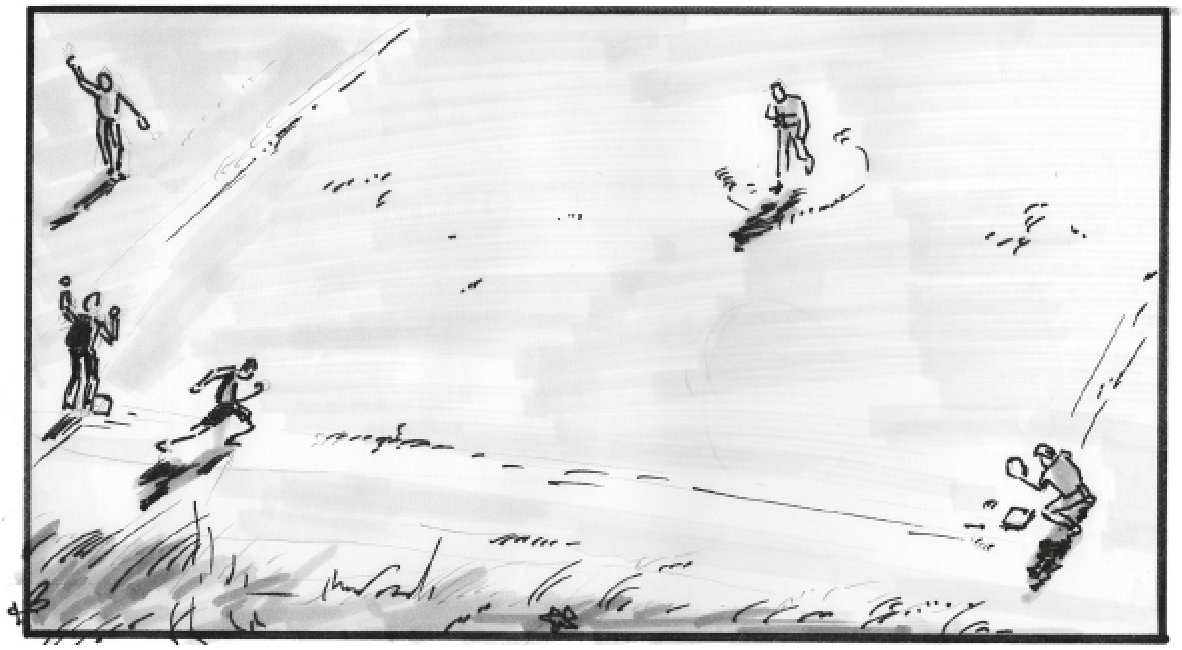
30. The second baseman and centerfielder botch the catch.



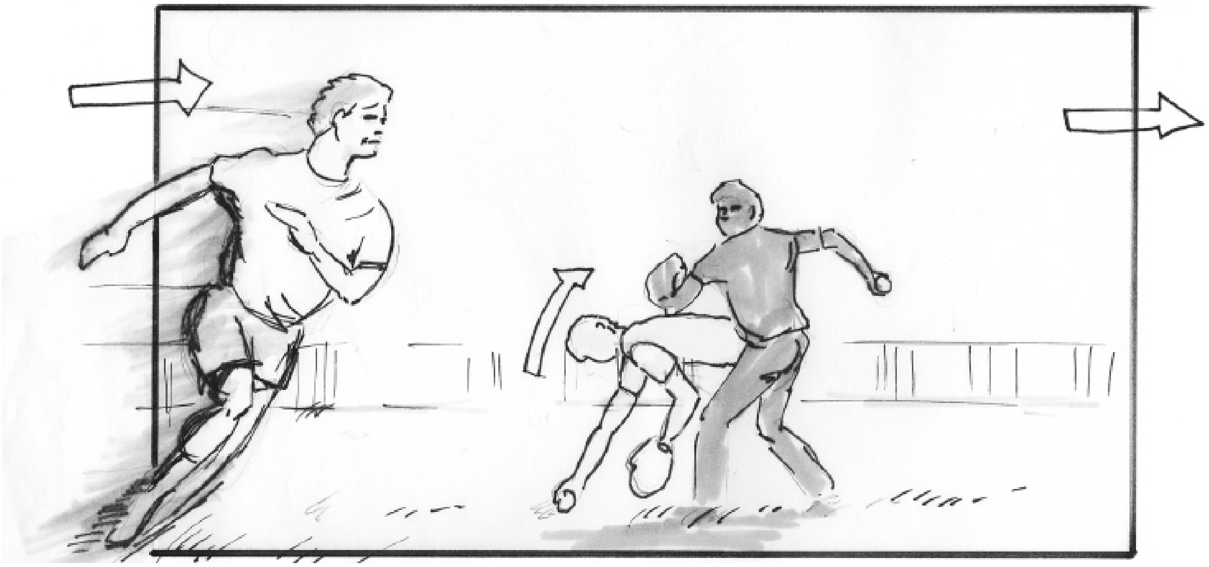
31. The batter rounds third.



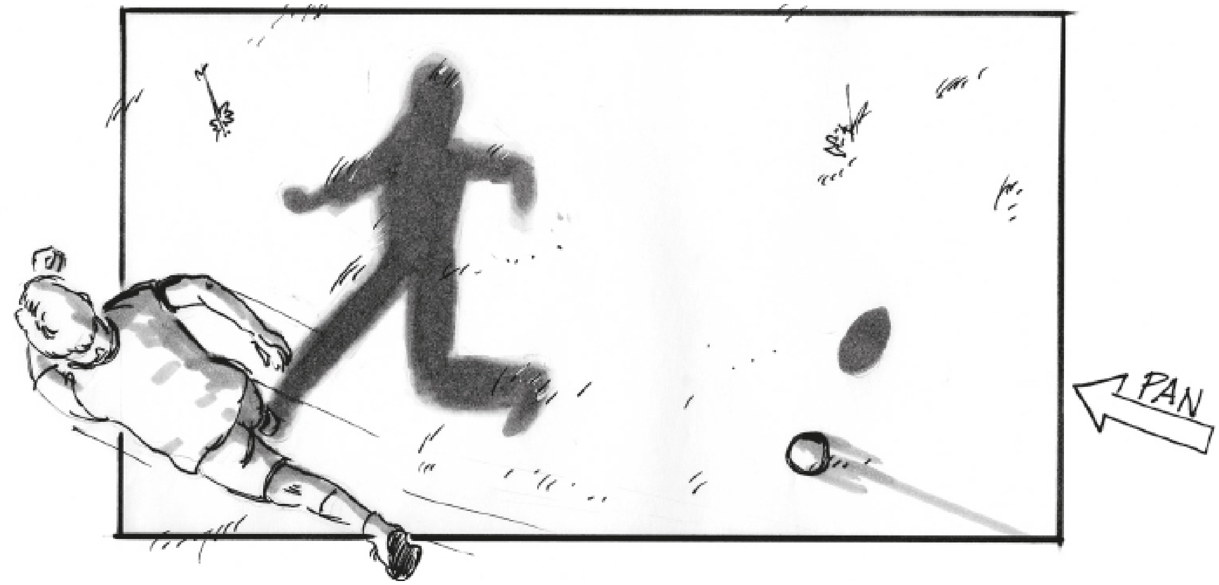
32. The pitcher screams, "You idiots!" at the infield.



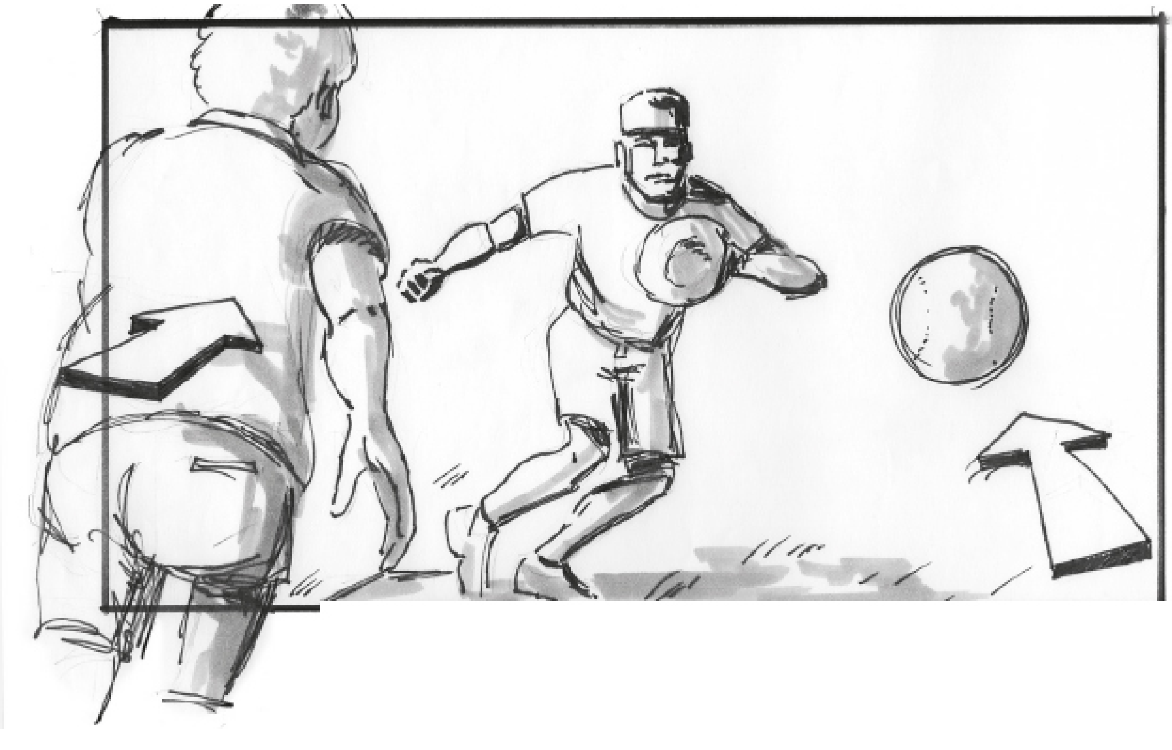
33. The batter heads for home.



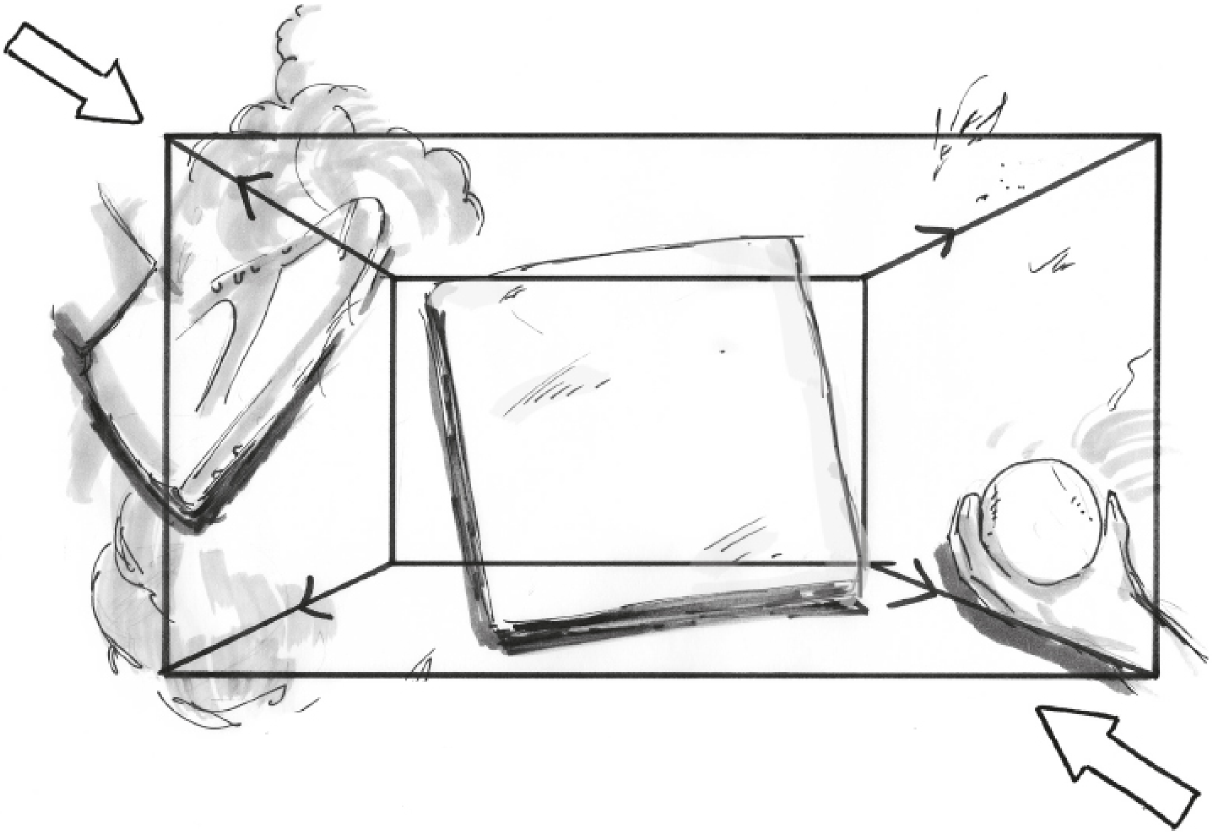
34. The shortstop scoops up the ball and throws home as the batter runs by in the foreground.



35. Extreme down shot. Slow motion. The camera pans with the shadow of the running batter. The ball slowly enters the shot. It's a race of shadows.



36. Slow motion continues. Camera points down the baseline to home as the catcher gets ready.



37. Camera pulls back from CU of home plate in slow motion. Batter's foot and catcher's hand move in slowly towards the plate. Dust covers the frame.

Summary

As you can see from this brief story, camera angles are strongly dependent on narrative as well as other graphic and staging strategies. In this case, slow motion and the use of shadows motivated some of the camera angles, as well as the use of "graphic staging," since the ball traveled high above the scene while the shadows were on the ground, as if they were actors in the scene. Naturally, forcing the camera to follow action that is low and high will have a lot to do with the camera angles needed to record a scene. Of course, slight variations in camera angle are as important as the more extreme angles of view and help to establish a rhythm of movement.

I should add that this storyboard is a first draft based on thumbnail drawings, which were used to plan out the basic idea. The first 20 rough sketches took a little more than an hour to draw in pencil. More than half of the panels did not change significantly from these first compositions, while the rest of the panels were redrawn. In practice, there might be 2 or 20 drafts of a storyboard until the ideas are worked out satisfactorily. For example, the initial idea was just to have a pitcher come to the plate and hit a home run. The business with the sun and the clouds and the slow motion developed from the rough sketches. When I went to ink the panels, I decided to add the fanciful gutter pipe gag, which would probably not survive another draft.

15 Open and Closed Framings

The terms open and closed compositions are used to describe the types of framing techniques and strategies devised to include or exclude the viewer from the picture space. Open and closed framings are related to the dramatic circle of action and being in or out of the action. Open and closed framing basically refers to how tight the framing of the action is. As it turns out open framings are typical of being in the action while closed framings are usually wider and similar to being outside the action. In film, open framings are compositions of the type usually found in documentaries, where many of the elements in the frame are beyond the filmmaker's control. In such stagings, several subjects may be partially cut off by the edge of the frame or partially obscured by foreground elements. Closed framings are compositions with subjects carefully positioned for maximum clarity and graphic balance. This way of composing pictures is likely to be found when the camera is placed outside the circle of action. Open forms seem more realistic, while closed forms seem staged.

This distinction is not without contradictions. The truth, of course, is that all compositions are arranged by the photographer to some degree, whether it is obvious to the viewer or not. Television commercials have borrowed the pictorial look of documentary film, carefully arranging compositions to look unarranged. This kind of studied offhandedness trades on the public's general association between documentary-style images and objective reporting. Alternately, many documentarians produce highly stylized compositions by waiting weeks or months for the exact conditions of weather and season to produce an image for heightened effect. In our image-saturated culture, it is becoming increasingly difficult to differentiate between authentic and misleading open and closed forms since image-makers of all types are fully aware of their popular meanings, often using them to deceive the viewer.

It's probably best to think of open and closed framing as general descriptions, remembering that techniques derive their significance from the contexts in which they are placed. For the narrative filmmaker, the most interesting aspect of open and closed framings is the way in which they are used to offer the viewer varying degrees of involvement and intimacy with the subjects on the screen. How the filmmaker uses this relationship raises the issue of aesthetic distance.

Aesthetic Distance

Aesthetic distance is a phrase used to describe the degree to which a work of art manipulates the viewer. All communications are in some way manipulative, but some works allow the viewer greater opportunity for reflection and participation at the moment of viewing than others. In filmmaking, aesthetic distance is aptly named, because unlike the novelist or poet, a filmmaker actually creates the illusion of physical depth and distance in the frame and, ultimately, in the movie theater. The size of a shot, from an extreme close-up to a long shot, places the audience in a physical relationship with the subject that has psychological and, ultimately, moral implications.

Levels of Intimacy

In this next section of examples, we'll look at the ways that framing, choice of camera angle, and different lenses affect the degree of involvement the viewer has with the scene space and the individuals in the scene.

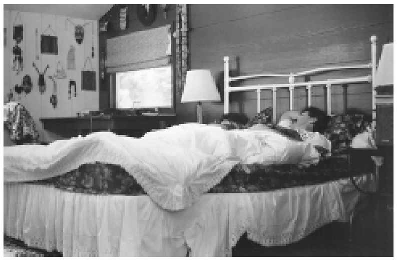
Our narrative follows a man and woman in bed. The man has spent the night with the woman after having just met her the night before. He knows that she regrets inviting him to her apartment, and now, as morning light enters the room, they are both reluctant to face the expectations each of them has for the other. The filmmaker would like to bring the viewer into the dramatic circle of action so that he can feel the intimacy of the relationship. Since the scene is written from the man's point of view, the filmmaker feels he must maintain this view in the composition of shots.

Open Framing

Version One

The filmmaker decides to open the scene with a wide shot of the bedroom. He shoots three test shots, frames 1, 2, and 3, and places them side by side. Because the scene is written from the man's point of view, he selects a view shot from the man's side of the bed. He places the camera at a low angle so that the man is easier to see than the woman, thereby encouraging our identification with the man. The filmmaker considers his choices and realizes that frames 2 and 3 may be too close to the subject. Since he expects to move in to CU framings later in the sequence, he would like there to be a significant change in shot size from the opening shot to the anticipated CUs. Therefore, he chooses frame 1 to open the scene.

1



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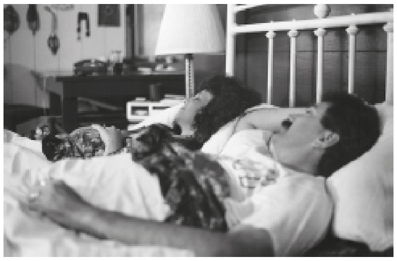

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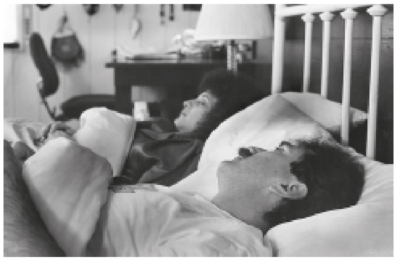
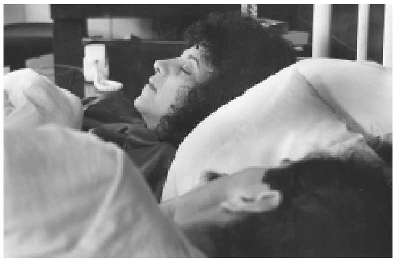


Open Framing

Version Two

The filmmaker decides to move in for a shot of the woman, and photographs three OTS shots to choose from. In each, the man is clearly looking at the woman. Notice how frames 2 and 3 use depth of field to selectively emphasize one of the subjects. Though it is generally thought that the focused player is the one that is emphasized, this is not always the case. By choosing just the right framing and action, the unfocused player can be made the key subject. The filmmaker selects frame 1 because he wants to move into the scene slowly and feels that frames 2 and 3 are too intimate at this stage in the action.

1



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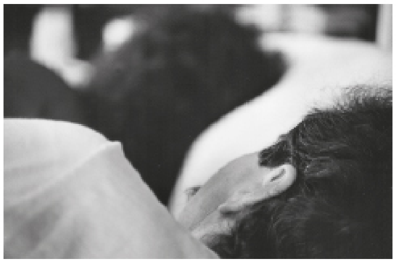

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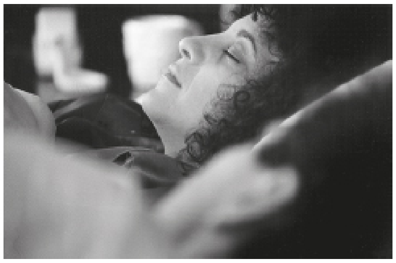
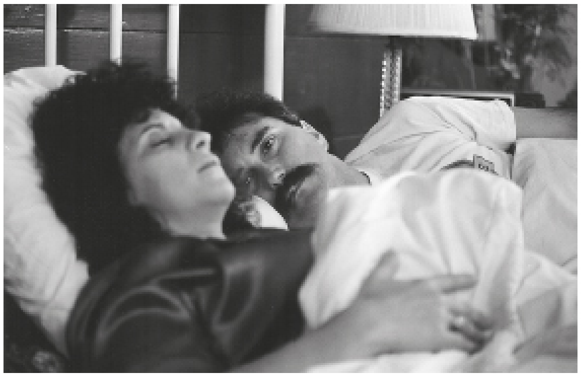


Open Framing

Version Three

The filmmaker compares two new shots, this time from a reverse angle that will be used after the previous shot. Having maintained emotional distance in the last shot, the filmmaker decides to move in somewhat closer this time. He chooses frame 2. This is done to involve the viewer in a more intimate way, and for the graphic contrast that the change in size produces.

1



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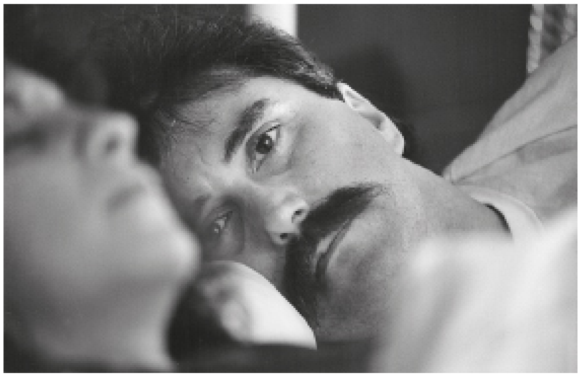
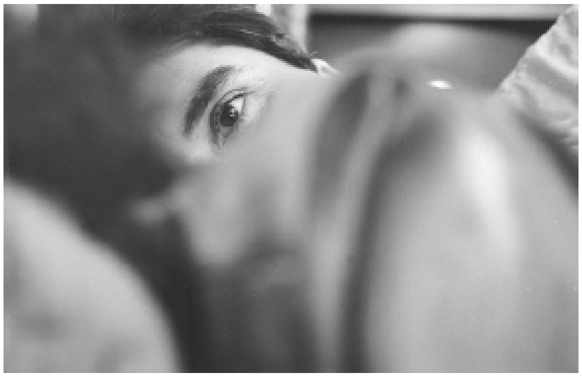


Open Framing

Version Four

The filmmaker reviews the sequence and is bothered by his last choice. He likes moving into a closer shot for the reverse, but feels that the clarity of the CU of the man in the reverse is too bold. He also feels that he would like to see more of the woman. He now realizes that frame 2 is too much of a summation of the man's position — too egocentric. He tests two new compositions, frames 3 and 4.

10



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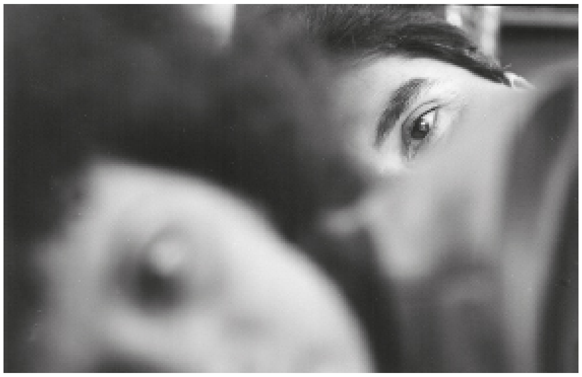


These two frames are extremely open. In both of them, the woman has been repositioned so that she is turned away from the man. The shots are nearly identical except that frame 4 permits us to see the woman's face even though it is beyond the depth of field. Most important, we can see that she is awake with her eyes open. Each shot strongly affects the dramatic emphasis of the scene. Frame 3 expresses the man's inability to understand the woman. She masks our view of him, and yet she also is withheld from our view. In a sense, we are placed in the same position as the man. Frame 4 is almost painfully revealing. We now see that the woman is awake but unable to face the man. The sense of separation is acute. This is the shot the filmmaker chooses.

The open framing creates a context in which we share the man's psychological point of view using framing and story elements. If the filmmaker had wanted to allow the viewer to watch the scene from a neutral perspective, he might have created the scene using closed framings. This distancing is not absolute but, like open-framed strategies, can be created in varying degrees. It is rare to find a film that uses open or closed framings exclusively. The filmmaker decides that he will reconceive the bedroom scene using closed framing, permitting the viewer to watch the scene unfold with less physical and emotional involvement.

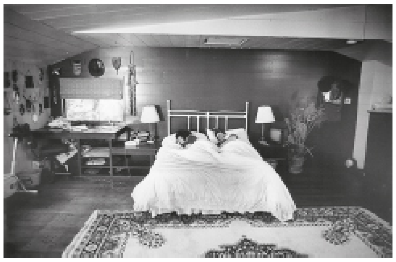
Closed Framing

Version One

The filmmaker tests three different camera angles for the opening shot, frames 1, 2, and 3. Frame 1 is symmetrical, with little dynamic tension to motivate the next shot. This permits the viewer to access the frame and the action without the pull of shot flow. The action is so far away, however, that the move to a closer shot is required if more detail is to be seen. The filmmaker may opt to hold this shot throughout the scene and move the action towards the camera by having the couple leave the bed rather than change viewpoints through cutting. Frame 2 permits a better view of the couple and limits the degree of intimacy the viewer feels by placing the couple in a viewpoint that is not on the human scale. In this case, we are not only outside the circle of dramatic action, we are high above it. Finally, frame 3 is the least closed shot, but it still maintains a neutral and distanced stance. Notice that the angularity tends to make the shot less closed.

The filmmaker likes frame 1 and considers staging the scene so that the players must sit up in bed to play out the action. Before doing this, he tries one other series of shots.

1



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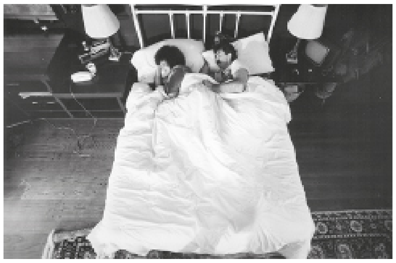

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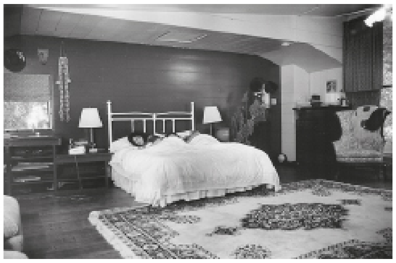
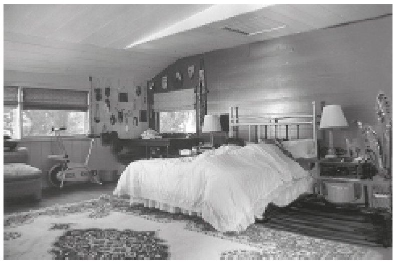


Closed Framing

Version Two

The three frames in this last closed composition series are a sequence, not individual versions of a master shot. The filmmaker decides that if he is not going to use CUs or medium shots of the couple he can maintain emotional distance while cutting from the appropriate side of the bed when we hear the thoughts of the man or the woman. This entire approach is highly stylized and avoids the psychological identification with character that is fundamental to the continuity style. Neither approach insures balanced treatment of the subject, though open-framing devices and other distancing strategies have been lauded by radical filmmakers as less manipulative. Ultimately, the viewer is manipulated no matter what technique is employed, and a film can have no more integrity than the intentions and perspicacity of the filmmaker permit, regardless of technique.

1



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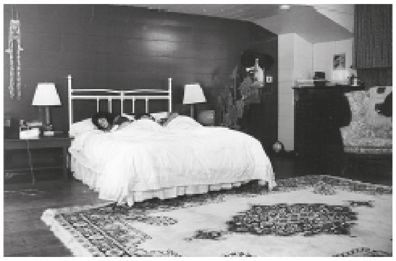

Framing Devices

As we have just seen, open framings utilize foreground elements to enclose a subject for emphasis or as a way of placing a subject within a new context or including the viewer in the scene space. Framing devices are also used for purely compositional reasons to increase the sense of depth in the frame. Several framing devices are shown on the next page.

In Figure 15.1, doorways become frames within the frame, distancing us from the action. We are placed in the position of eavesdropping on a conversation.

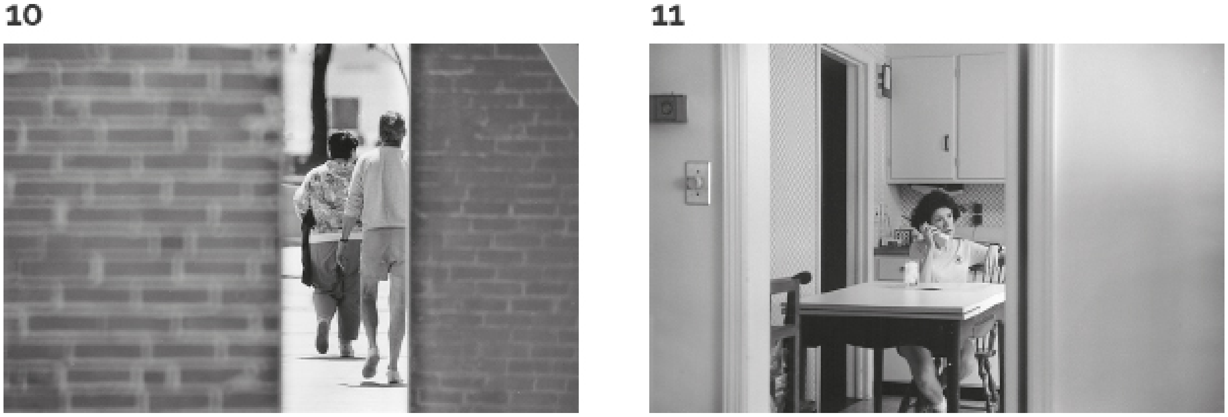
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Figure 15.1

Different levels of action can be isolated, as in the next shot in Figure 15.2. In this case, architecture is used to frame the action.

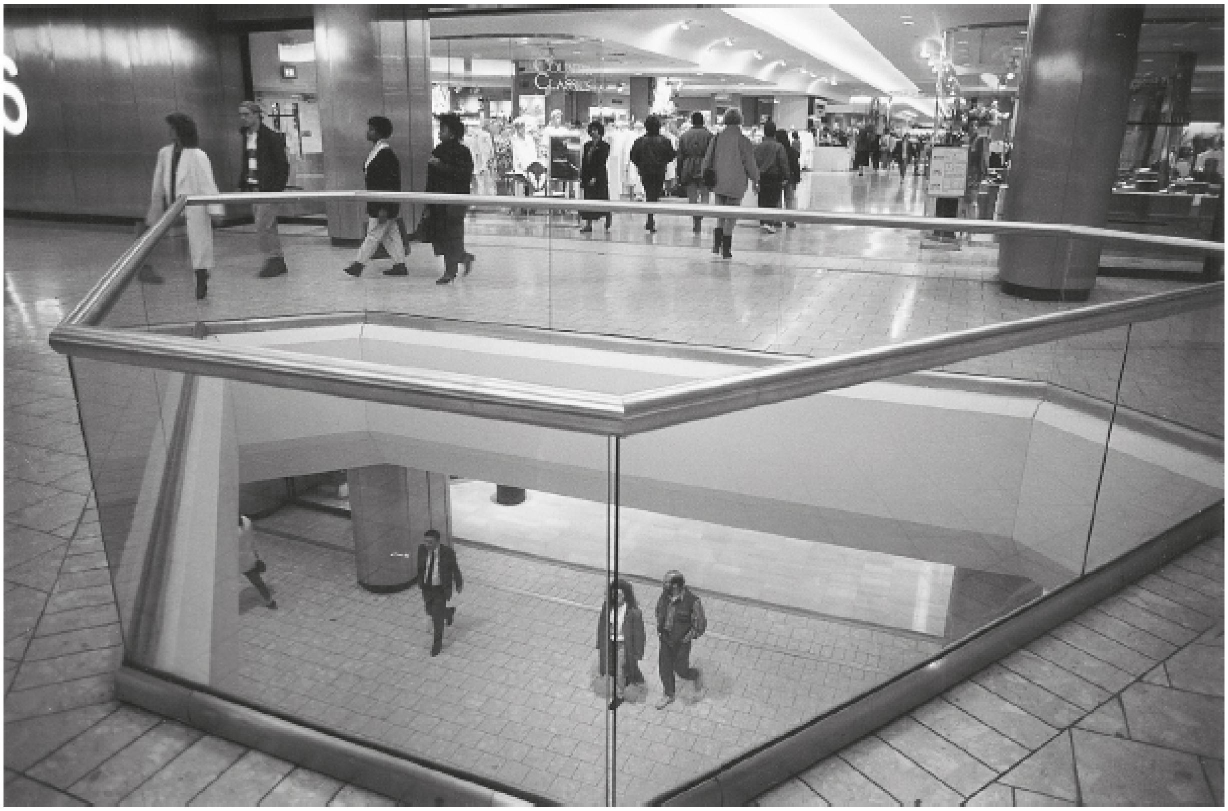


Figure 15.2

In Figure 15.3 (page 273), telephoto lenses, because they compress action in depth, crowd many foreground elements (that may actually be very far away) in front of the camera. This use of framing devices tends to withhold information by revealing only portions of the principal subject. This is the opposite of a window or doorway frame, which directs our attention more emphatically to the subject within the square.

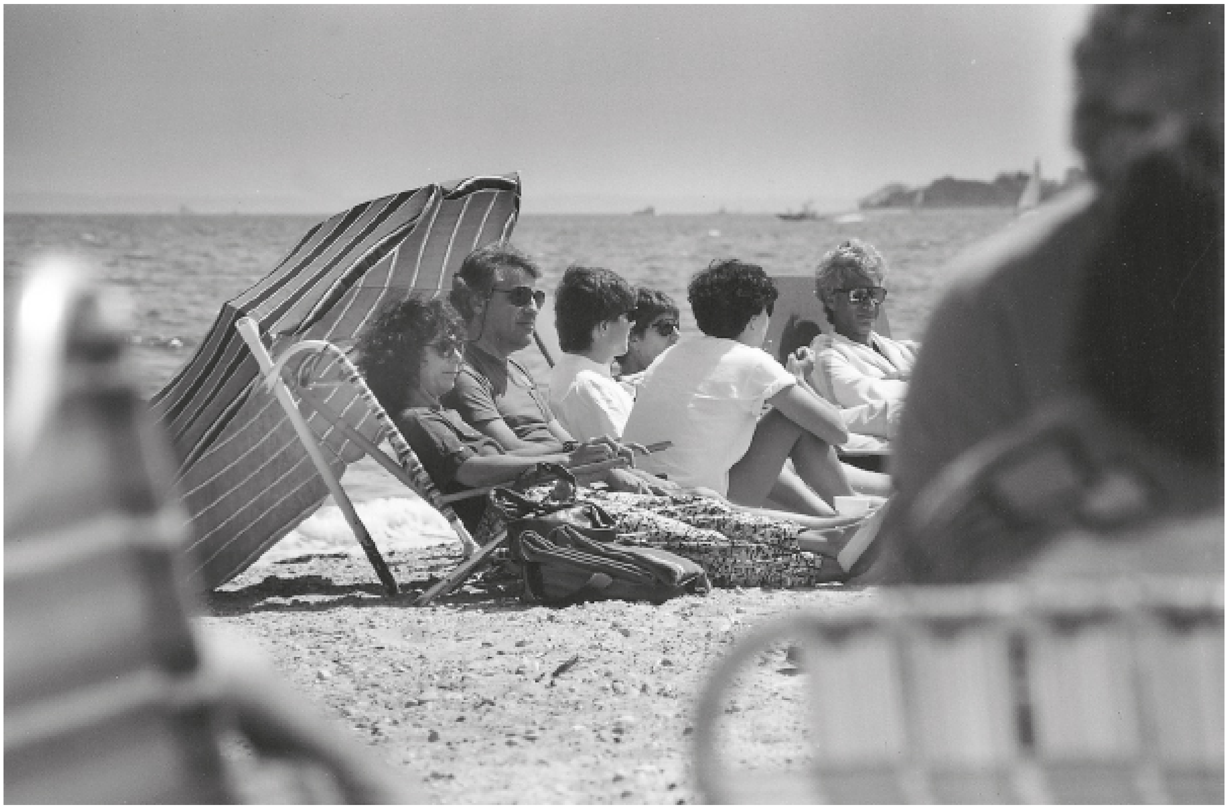


Figure 15.3

Mirrors have always fascinated filmmakers and can become a way of combining the “shot, reverse shot” cutting pattern in a single shot. A shot of this type is shown in Figure 15.4.

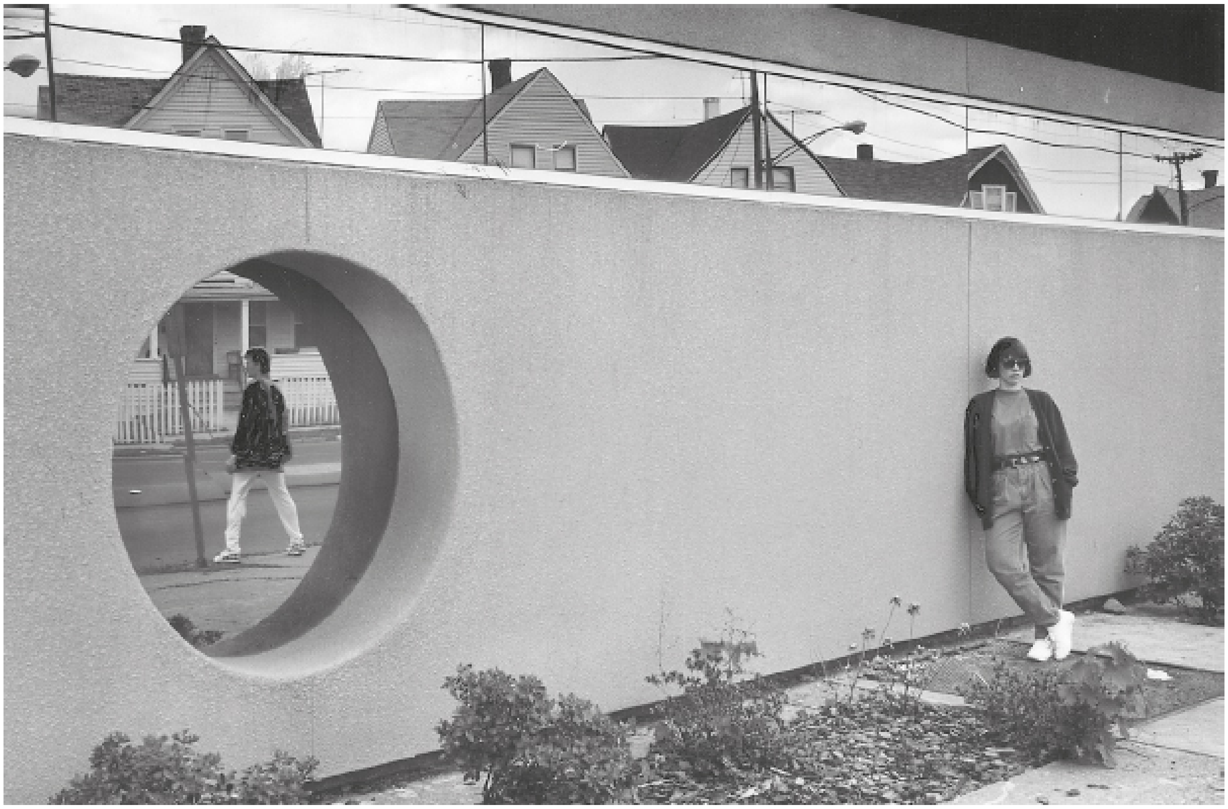


Figure 15.4

We now can move on to point of view, the subject of the next chapter, which is intimately connected to the type of framing devices we have just looked at.

16 Point Of View

In the last chapter on open and closed framings, we considered the ways in which graphic and editorial techniques determine *the level of involvement* the viewer has with the characters on the screen. Point of view, on the other hand, determines with *whom* the viewer identifies. The two concepts are closely related and nearly always work together in any sequence.

Each shot in a film expresses a point of view, and in narrative film the point of view changes often, sometimes with each new shot. For the most part, point of view — what is often called narrative stance — is largely invisible to the audience, though the accumulated effect of the changes profoundly affects the way the audience interprets any scene. Apart from the familiar subjective techniques of the kind used by Alfred Hitchcock, the ways in which camera placement, editing, and composition shape the narrative stance of any scene generally is overlooked. This probably accounts for the fact that point of view, which may be the most important aspect of a director's contribution, is handled indifferently in so many films. Frequently, narrative stance is the accidental result of technical or pictorial concerns, or worse, relentless manipulation.

To better understand how the filmmaker can use the camera to determine point of view, let's begin by looking at the three types of narration used in films, borrowing the terminology used to denote point of view in literature.

First-Person Point of View

First-person narratives are exemplified by the subjective techniques of Hitchcock in which we see events through the eyes of a character — the "I" of the story. Extensive use of the subjective viewpoint has always been awkward in narrative film, largely because we are only given the visual point of view of a character and are deprived of seeing his or her reactions through facial or other gestures.

Third-Person Restricted Point of View

Third-person restricted, which presents the action as seen by an ideal observer, is the style of narrative most common in Hollywood movies, but rarely is it used as the sole viewpoint. Most of the time it is combined with limited use of omniscient and subjective passages.

Omniscient Point of View

For film to present the omniscient point of view we have to know what the characters are thinking. This requires some type of narration, voiceover, or graphics. Overt narration is thought by many to be uncinematic and is rarely used. Actually, narration has been explored only tentatively, and so far, no mainstream narrative director has evolved a style that combines words and images in a particularly inventive way. The field is open for new ideas.

Levels of Identification

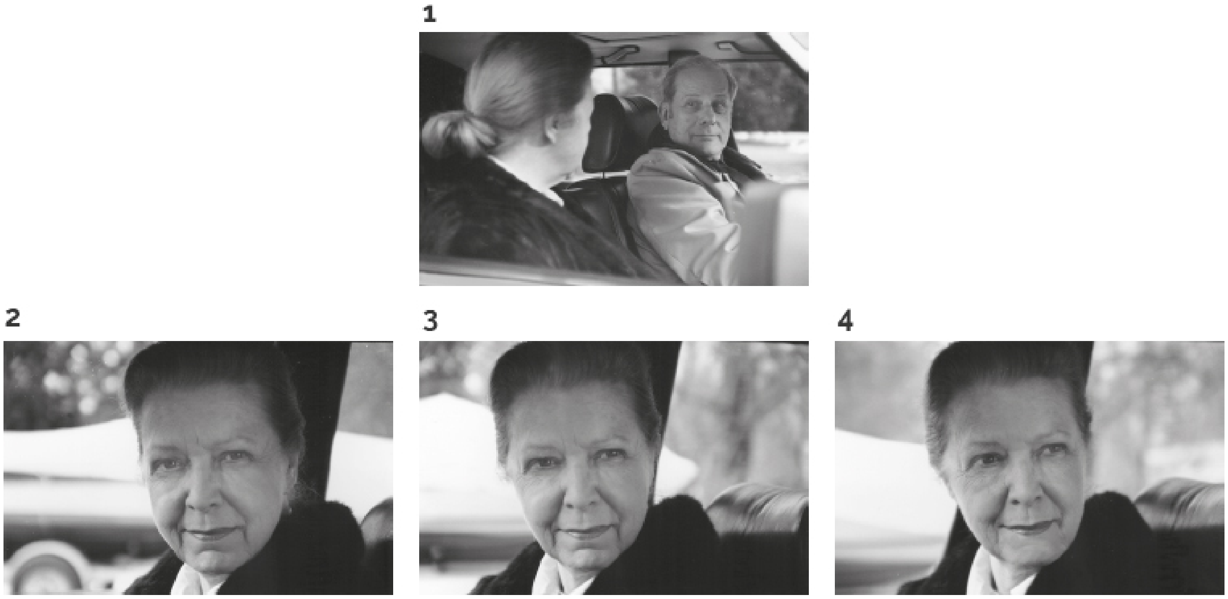
In a novel or short story, there is no question whose point of view we are reading at any moment. In film, the point of view can be less definite, and in some instances, a shot can convey a narrative stance somewhere between a third-person and a fully subjective shot.

In editing, the most powerful cueing device is the sight line of an actor in CU. Figure 16.1 illustrates a typical setup for a POV shot: the cut on the look. Below this first shot are three possible reverse CUs.

In frame 1, a man looks at a woman seated next to him in a car. In frame 2, we cut to his POV, a CU of the woman looking back at him. Since it is a subjective camera shot, she looks directly into the camera. Used in this way the CU is clearly seen from the man's POV. Compare this with the CU in frame 3, shot at about 45 degrees from the woman's sightline. This is clearly a third-person restricted view. The shot does not elicit our identification with either the man or the woman. But what happens if we move the camera a few degrees outside of the woman's sight line as shown in frame 4? In this case, we are placed in a closer relationship to the man, provided the narrative sets up the CU as the man's look. In a sense, this is a modified subjective shot.

This is a valuable concept: *There are degrees of subjectivity, or to put it more accurately, degrees of identification for any shot*. For this reason, OTS shots and two-shots can favor the point of view of one of the players in a scene, depending on the line of sight of the actors and the narrative context. Generally speaking, *the closer the line of sight of a player in CU is to the camera, the greater the degree of viewer identification*.

Figure 16.1



Viewer Involvement and Identification

There are two ways to determine viewer identification: by graphic control or by narrative control. Graphic control elicits our identification with a player using composition and staging. The modified subjective shot we considered on the previous page is an example of graphic control determined by how a player is composed in the frame.

Narrative control directs our identification using several strategies, but these are largely dependent on editing. For instance, in a detective story, the plot usually follows the private eye. Scenes begin when the private eye arrives at a location and end when he exits a scene. Even when this kind of story is covered in third-person restricted camera setups in closed framings, the narrative context implies that we are learning of events from the private eye’s point of view.

Shaping Point of View

There are no hard and fast rules for the graphic and narrative control of point of view. Both factors are dependent on one another for their full meaning. One of the most important skills a filmmaker develops with experience is a greater awareness, largely intuitive, of the predominant point of view in any shot and sequence.

In the following examples, we join the filmmaker as he returns to the scene of the man and woman in bed from the previous chapter. This first series of photoboards stages a subjective sequence using the cut on the look to set up shots. However, the basic principles shown here are also applicable to dramatic situations that are not purely subjective.

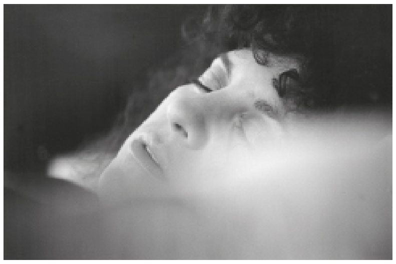
Point of View (Version One)

The filmmaker begins frame 1 by fading up from black as a subjective equivalent to the man opening his eyes as he awakens in the morning. Frame 1a is the CU shot of the woman from the man's POV after the fade up is completed. Frame 2 is a reverse CU shot of the man partly obscured by the bed covers. This is a reversal of the usual editing pattern of the cut on the look. In this version, the POV shot comes first and the "look" second.

The filmmaker decides to revise the sequence with a new opening shot of the woman in frame 3. This time we see only the back of her head and her fingers in her hair. She turns towards the camera in frame 3, completing the movement in frame 3a. Frame 4 serves as the cut to the look, though we do not see the man's eyes in this tight OTS shot. Compare this frame with frame 2 in the previous series. Both frames serve the purpose of identifying the CU of the woman as a POV shot.

1

1a



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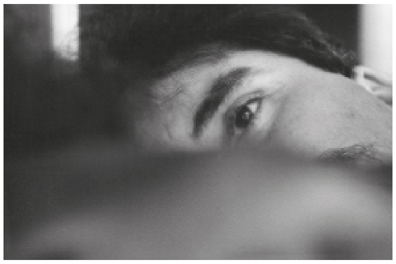

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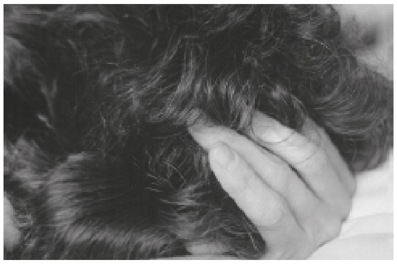
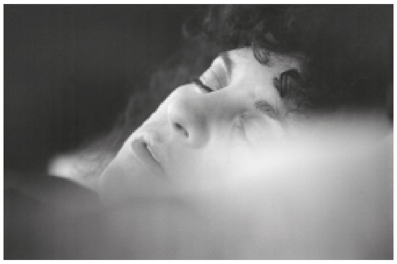


3a



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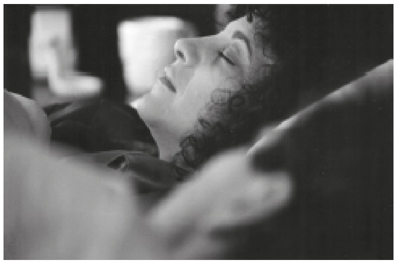
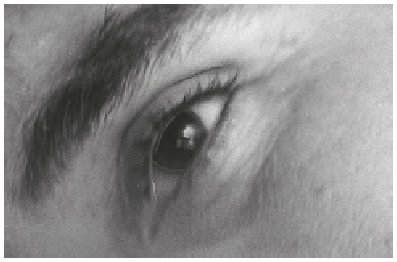


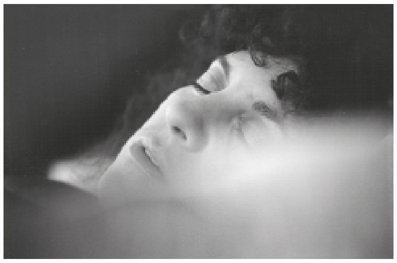
Point of View (Version Two)

The filmmaker decides to open the scene in a traditional POV editing pattern beginning with the ECU of the eye. This is followed by the obligatory reverse to the POV shot and an OTS two-shot. Now go back and look at the previous version. These might be the choices offered to you by an editor in a rough cut based on these few shots. If the footage was photographed with a stationary camera, you could easily change the order of the shots. If, however, the shots involved zoom movement or camera movement, your options would be reduced, assuming you followed traditional continuity practice.

3



3a



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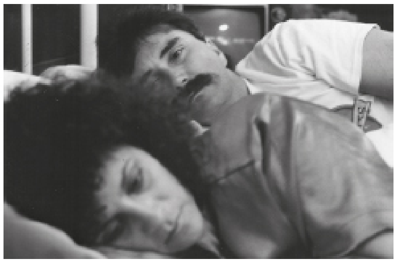

Point of View (Version Three)

This time the filmmaker will devise an aural/subjective sequence. The viewer will see and hear things from the man's point of view. This extended sequence begins below and continues on the following page. Frame 1 opens in darkness. Sounds of soft breathing are heard, and the picture fades up slowly to frames 2–4, which are CUs of the bed covers moving with the woman's steady breathing. In frame 5, we see a CU of the man, very nearly a CU of his ear. This is the aural equivalent to a cut on the look beginning with a shot of the eyes. We cut to frame 6, a CU of the woman's face with her breathing emphasized on the soundtrack. In frame 7 we return to the man, who is awake and watching the woman. Frame 8 is a visual subjective shot of the woman's shoulder from the man's POV as she turns away from him. In frame 9 we return to an ECU of the man's eye watching the woman. In frame 10, the filmmaker abruptly *changes to the woman's point of view*. We stay with this shot for several seconds until the woman moves out of frame as she sits up.

In frame 11, the woman sits on the edge of the bed and then turns to the man in frame 12. The filmmaker cuts on the look to an OTS shot. Because frame 13 is so tight over the woman's shoulder and is clearly lined up along her line of sight, we share her general viewpoint and identify with her. The filmmaker doesn't take the scene any further than this moment but makes one last change to limit the number of shots by replacing shots 12 and 13 with a single reverse two-shot in frame 14. In this case, the framing includes the woman's look and the object of her look in a single shot. Interestingly, while the action is seen from the position of a third person, the staging encourages us to identify with her. On a visual level, the subject of the shot is the woman looking at the man. This, however, is merely a way of provoking our interest in knowing her reaction to what she sees. The secondary subject of the shot is the woman's thoughts since her reaction is not externalized in dialogue or other behavior. By asking the viewer to consider the woman's feelings, this setup shares many of the qualities of a subjective shot.

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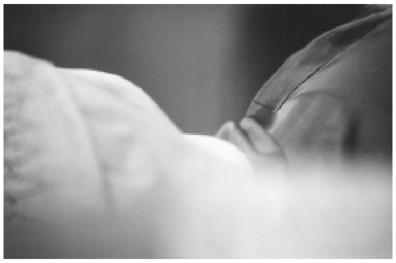

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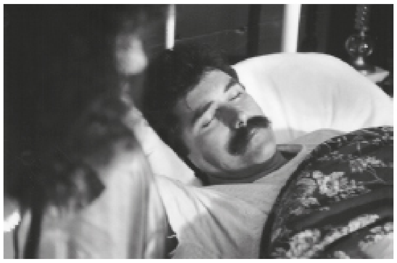


14

Narrative Control of Point of View

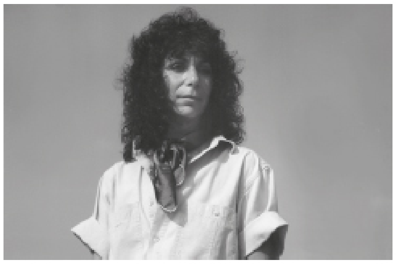
In this next situation, a woman looks for her husband on the beach and finds him sitting alone by the shore. Our purpose here is to discover ways of achieving viewer's identification with one of the characters in a scene.

Narrative Control (Version One)

This first sequence uses the classic subjective setup: In frame 1, a woman looks at something offscreen; in frame 2, we see the object of her attention. In frame 3, the geographical relationship is established in a two-shot. In this sequence, we identify with the woman for two reasons: First, she is the person who escorts us, the viewers, into the scene. Second, in frame 3 the two-shot favors her line of sight. This is undercut slightly because we are outside the circle of dramatic action, tending toward the view of a neutral observer.

Compare this with the next series, frames 4–6, which ends with a new shot at the end. In this case, we have remained within the woman's line of sight in the final shot, but from a reverse angle. These two graphic strategies develop our identification with the woman differently. Interestingly, being closer to the man in frame 6 does not significantly diminish our identification with the woman. This is because the narrative context of the sequence, beginning with the woman, shapes the way we read the following shots.

1



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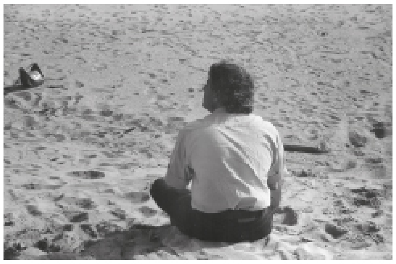

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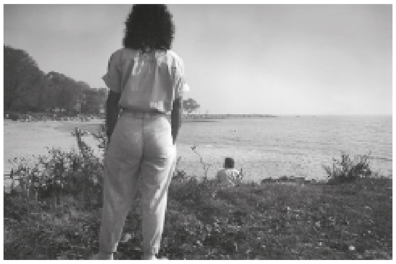

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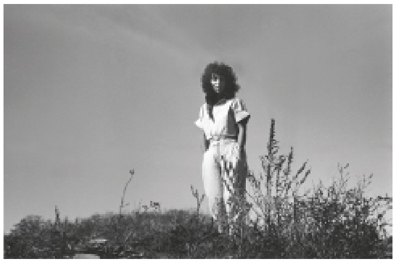

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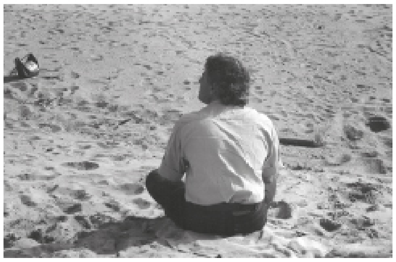

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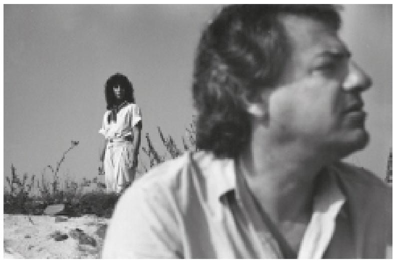
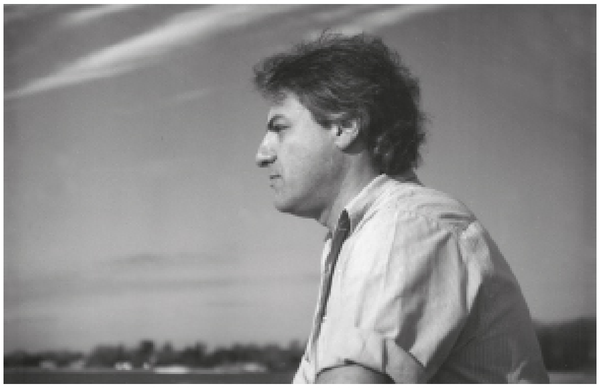


Narrative Control (Version Two)

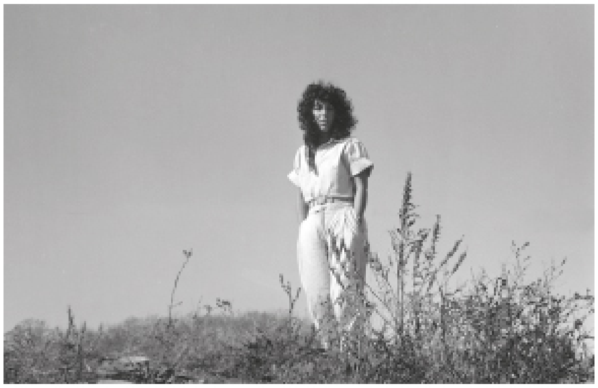
In this next series we can see what happens if we begin the previous sequence with the man. The question is whether or not this establishes our identification with him instead of the woman. The answer, I think, is that the point of view is divided between the woman and the man, depending on the editing. To test this point, look at this sequence as you might expect it to appear onscreen. First, time the shots as you read them so that the shots of the man are longer than the shots of the woman. Now read the scene and make the woman's shots (frames 2–3) longer. Identification usually will side with the subject given the most screen time. Also, the woman is clearly looking at the man, while the man's attention is not focused on any activity that we can easily share.

Part of the strategy that sets this up is the right-angle shot of the man, which is in contrast to the woman's line of sight. This introduces another factor related to the eyeline in determining point of view. Any aspect of a shot that suggests thought on the part of a subject sets up conditions that are favorable to identification. Shots of the eyes, and CUs in general, fall into this category. This is why the over-the-hip shot of the woman in frame 3 does not greatly enhance the cut on the look in frame 2. If an OTS shot showing the woman's head were substituted, our identification with her might be stronger.

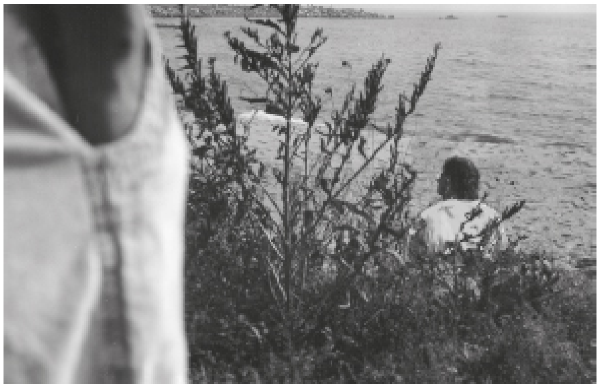
1



2



3



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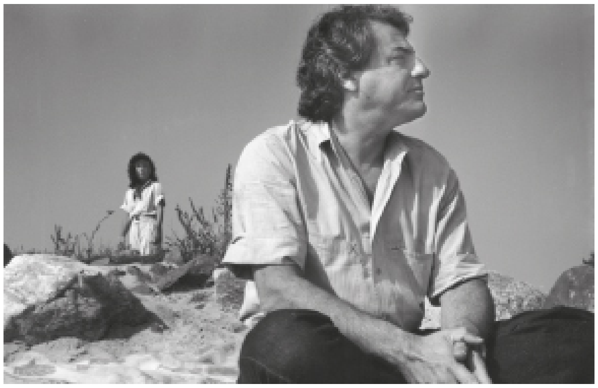
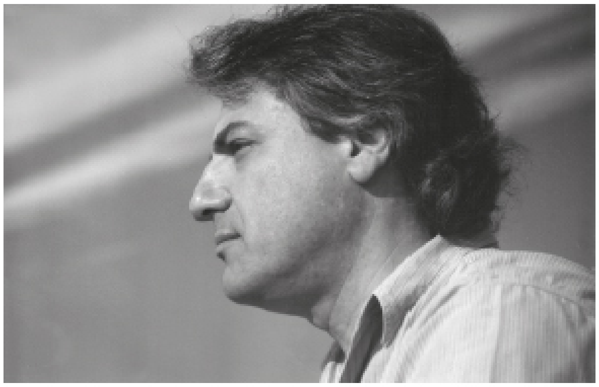


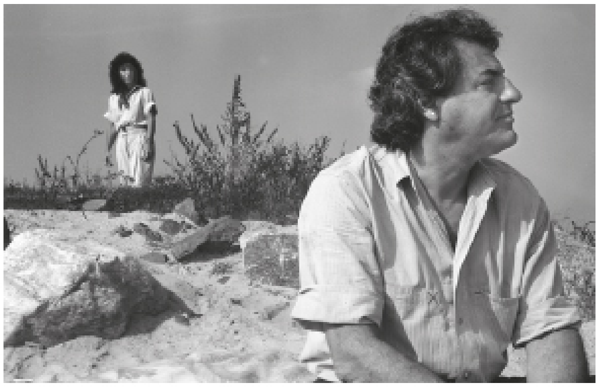
Narrative Control (Version Three)

In this final series, we combine the strategies of versions one and two to see how subtly identification can be controlled. In frame 1, we begin with the man and cut directly to the woman looking at him. If we stop right here, our identification is with the woman. The cut to the woman's point of view clinches our identification with her, as does the final frame along her sight line. But now look over the shots again: As you can see, the man has the strongest CU graphically and is in three shots, while the woman is in only two.

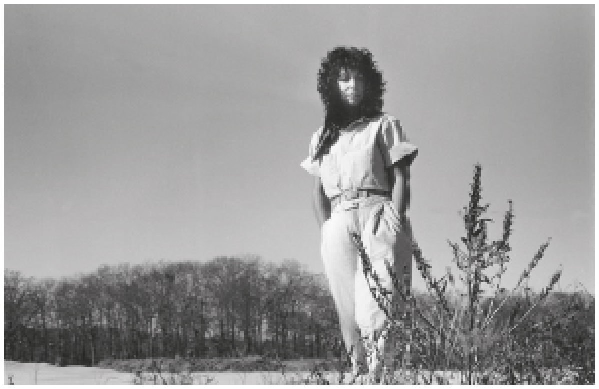
1



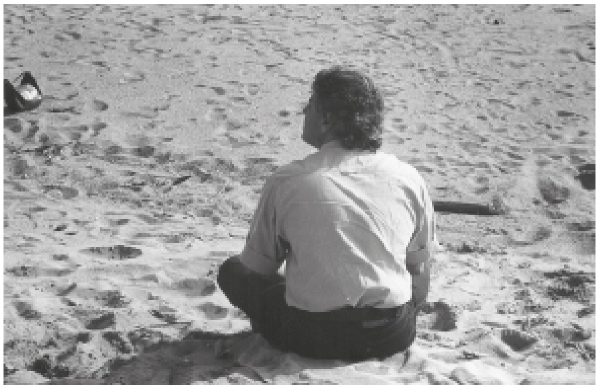
2



3



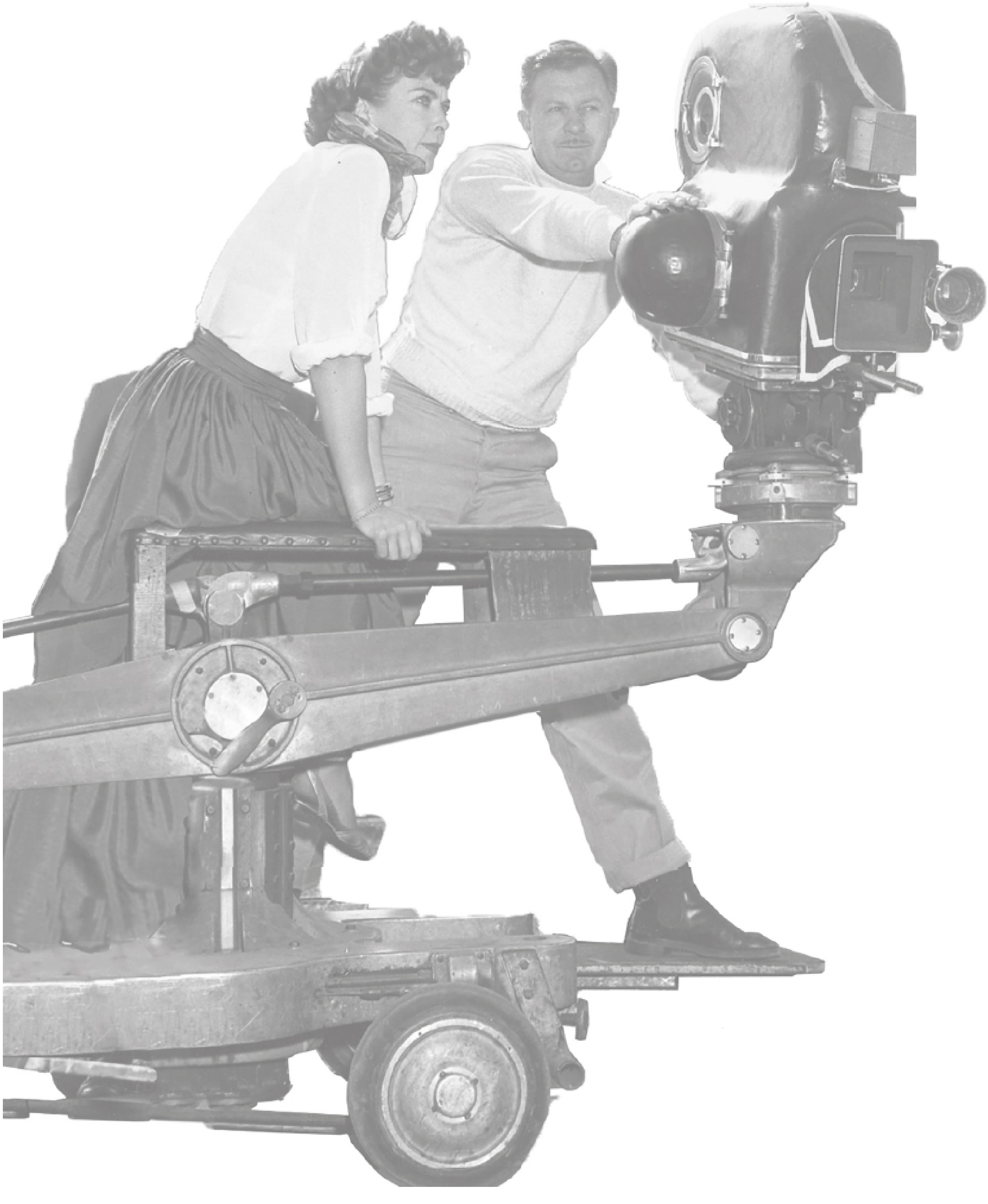
4



It's clear that the type of shot and the cooperation between shots is more important in developing a consistent point of view than the number of shots given to a particular character. Finally, it is important that the subject we identify with be seen consistently. In this last series, two shots of the woman from the same angle build identification more strongly than the three shots of the man, each from a different angle.

Part IV

The Moving Camera



Director Ida Lupino on set of *Outrage* (1950)

17 The Pan

The moving camera is uniquely cinematic and the different types of moves are defined by the specific mechanical supports that make them possible: the tripod, camera dollies, jib arms, and cranes. Over the past three decades, this gear has pushed mechanical design and manufacture to make amazing camera acrobatics possible. Computer control was added in the 80s, accelerating the use as an outgrowth of visual-effects technology, especially Industrial Light and Magic. Computer control means a complex camera move can be programmed into software and repeated by specialized camera support gear (smart dollies) with each move identical to the previous ones. This was essential for multiple camera passes for visual-effects creation. In modern dollies, remote operation has become the standard so that camera operators no longer need to be stationed on a dolly moving with the camera. Nowadays, the dolly and the camera head can be controlled remotely with a joystick or traditional geared-head hand wheels while the crew watches the camera view on a computer monitor, making highly complex moves possible. For example, one of the oldest manufacturers, Chapman/Leonard Studio Equipment, created the Hydrascope, a completely waterproof telescoping remote crane that can travel from a height of 38 feet into a pool of water. Many other suppliers provide camera cars, camera rigs for cars, and “helicopter” and various other versions of Steadicam (the original operator-worn camera stabilizer). All the above gear requires permits for public spaces and carries safety, liability, and logistical considerations.

Camera aesthetics have changed due to virtual cameras in computer animation programs and video games that have absolute freedom to go anywhere at any speed. This has led to a lot of pointless camera movement, something Steadicam initiated decades before on a far smaller scale. This aesthetic choice is based on the current trend promoting more cuts and motion because it’s attention grabbing. The trend has grown to the point that the mainstream audiences seem to have less patience for slower-paced techniques. There is no hard evidence for this; regardless, camera technology constantly strives to make a real-world camera as free as a virtual camera in the computer. This is not encouraging aesthetic restraint.

The latest development in camera choreography has put huge sweeping camera moves within the reach of even the smallest low-budget film. Of course, I'm referring to drones and multi-motor copters. With four to eight motors, there are drones that can carry large camera packages and gimbals. Drones under $500 have 2k and 4k cameras, stabilizers, and are programmable. While current drones are not quiet enough for work close to actors when dialogue is recorded, they are in the early stages of development and are having a major impact on low-budget aerial and crane-style camera moves in the space of a few years. Quieter drones are certainly going to be developed soon. GoPro cameras and their competitors are part of the same trend that puts exotic or at least very portable camera gear in the hands of low-budget filmmakers. What has happened is that between smartphone cameras, drones, and sports cameras, the world is under a microscope like never before.

In the next four chapters, we'll be looking at techniques for using the moving camera. Generally, a moving shot is more difficult and time-consuming to execute than a static shot, but it also offers graphic and dramatic opportunities unique to film. Camera movement replaces a series of edited shots used to follow a subject, to make connections between ideas, to create graphic and rhythmic variation, or to simulate the movement of a subject in a subjective sequence.

THE PAN

Of the three types of camera movement — panning, tracking, and craning — only panning is accomplished without moving the camera from one position to another. The different types of camera movement are frequently combined in a single shot, and a crane or dolly shot usually requires some panning to hold the subject in the frame. In a sequence shot, a tracking shot may combine a crane move with lateral tracking movement while panning and zooming to frame choreographed action.

The pan is the simplest of moving shots, comparatively easy to execute with modest equipment. Like all moving shots, it provides multiple views within a single shot as an alternative to editing.

Panning and Tilting

The pan shot is extremely versatile and is one of the easiest moves to execute, requiring none of the preparation or heavy equipment that tracking and craning do. In the horizontal panoramic shot, the camera rotates on its vertical axis as much as 360 degrees, taking in the entire visible horizon. The camera also can be angled up or down in a vertical pan or tilt. What distinguishes the pan from other types of camera movement is that the camera rotates on an axis in one location rather than actually being displaced. Consequently, the pan shot does not offer the dramatic shift in perspective that tracking, crane, and handheld shots do. In this respect, it is similar to the static shot. At the same time, the pan can cover space faster than tracking and crane shots in which the camera must be physically moved over the ground, usually with an operator and his or her assistant. The pan can easily frame one goalpost on a football field and move to the opposite goalpost in a second. Even a fast-moving tracking shot would take 10 seconds or more to cover the same distance.

A pan (horizontal rotation) or a tilt (vertical rotation) can be used to:

- Include space greater than can be viewed through a fixed frame.
- Follow action as it moves.
- Connect two or more points of interest graphically.
- Connect or imply a logical connection between two or more subjects.

Panoramic Shot

The most familiar use of the pan is a slow move over a landscape — a staple of home movies and outdoor pictures where wide-open spaces are featured. The scenic pan is usually used as an establishing shot. Typical uses are the vertical tilt up or down a skyscraper to convey a feeling of height and the horizontal pan to convey the immensity of a location like a desert or ocean that spreads well beyond the borders of a fixed frame.

A 180-degree pan of this type was used in a well-known shot by Howard Hawks in the Western *Red River*. Early on the morning of the first day of the massive cattle drive that serves as the center of the film, Hawks wanted to illustrate the immensity of the undertaking and the huge herd of cattle. He placed the camera in the middle of the herd near several of the principal characters who were seated on horses. A slow pan begins, taking in the nervous anticipation of the cowboys and the thousands of cattle that extend as far as the eye can see in all directions. The camera rotates in a semicircle until it reaches the dominant figure of John Wayne 30 seconds later. As the leader of the group of men who have staked their ranches on the success of the cattle drive, Wayne has the responsibility for their families and their futures. The pan allows us to share the moment when he considers the enormity of what he is about to do. The shot tells us that men are small and the undertaking is great. In the context of the Western, this relationship also defines the men's courage.

Panning to Reframe

The camera operator may use the pan to reframe a moving subject so it remains in a desired portion of the frame. Put simply, actors move. In reasonably close shots such as a medium shot, you will compose the actor(s) in the shot in a pleasing way. But the actor has his work to do to and he might create a compositional imbalance or move slightly out of frame as he performs. The camera operator will subtly reframe to follow the actor/action. The choice of reframing or locking the camera in position and forcing the actors to limit their movement depends on the dramatic intent of the scene. This use of the pan is intended to be invisible or unobtrusive.

Panning to Cover Action

When the field of view is great and the camera movement necessary to follow the action is extensive, the pan can cover wide spaces more quickly than any other type of camera movement. The pan is athletic and snappy, while many crane and dolly moves are precise and deliberate.

Camera placement is the key to panning with the action. As with any staging consideration, the type of panning required depends on whether or not the camera is in or out of the dramatic circle of action. Accentuating the sense of motion and space usually is done by placing the camera within the action. If the subject is moving, the camera will be forced to pan more extensively than if the camera is viewing the action from a distance.

Panning and Lenses

The focal length of the lens can magnify or reduce the sense of motion of a pan move. Long lenses like a telephoto increase the sense of motion during a pan, while a very wide lens decreases the sense of motion.

Imagine you are standing in a field with a camera in your hand pointing forward. If you now turn around to face the opposite direction always pointing the camera directly ahead, you've just made a 180-degree pan. If you used a wide-angle lens, the appearance of the background movement will be slight. That's because the wide-angle lens includes a great deal of background as much as 90 degrees. Therefore, the camera covers a distance twice of the width of what the camera sees when held still (180 divided by 90). If the same move is made with a telephoto lens the coverage of the lens or field of view might only be 10 degrees. Now when you pan the appearance of motion is much greater. That's because it now takes 18 fields of view (180 divided by 10) to cover the same rotational distance instead of just two with the wide-angle lens.

Director Akira Kurosawa frequently uses the telephoto pan for action employing foreground, middleground, and background elements to achieve different levels of motion and depth. The small depth of field apparent with the telephoto lens is used to isolate the subject as well as increase the sense of motion when the camera moves. In his samurai films, Kurosawa often framed running figures or galloping horses through woods using a telephoto lens, allowing the background to become a blur of light and dark shapes, while foreground elements like trees interrupt the frame rhythmically for a stroboscopic effect.

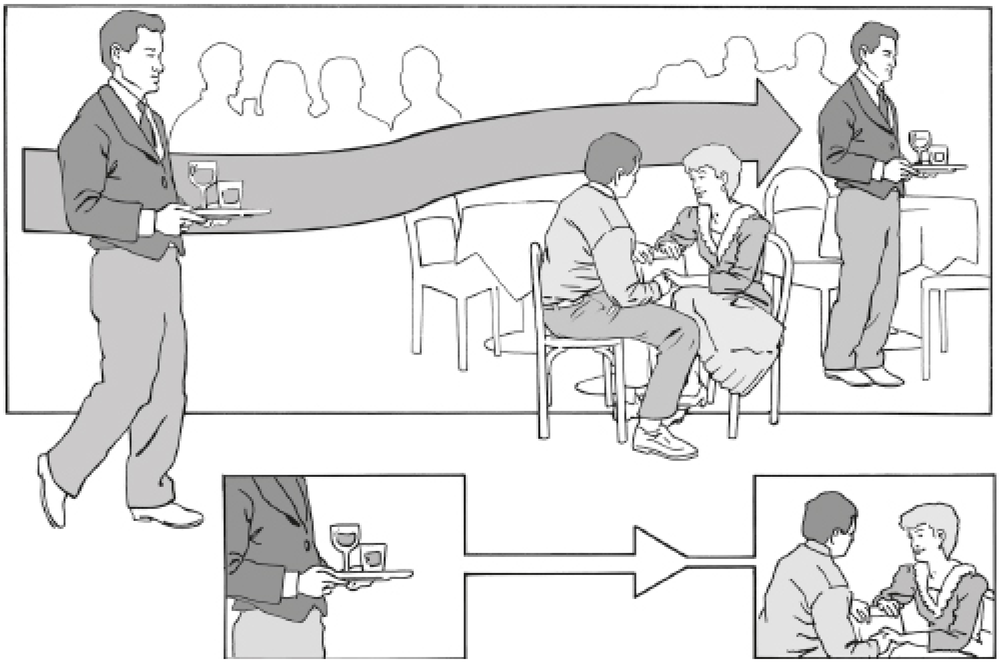


Figure 17.1

The use of the telephoto lens for this type of shot requires adroit camera operation; high-speed panning can be difficult, particularly in low-light conditions. Even so, extreme telephoto lenses can be used to great effect in demanding situations. While covering the fast whitewater rafting action in John Boorman's *Deliverance*, cinematographer Vilmos Zsigmond used a 1,000 mm lens to follow the erratic and unpredictable path of the main characters on the river. The 1,000 mm lens is very nearly the longest camera optic available, requiring extremely precise framing and focusing. Although Zsigmond was advised that he might have trouble following the action with this lens, he reported that the sequence was fairly easy to shoot.

Panning to Lead the Eye

The pan is highly manipulative and easily leads the eye from one point to another. A passing car or the motion of leaves blowing along the ground can motivate a pan to an area of narrative significance. The car or leaves may have no specific relationship to the action of the story, but the pan is such a compelling move that we usually do not question the effect, accepting it as a pictorial device. An attention-leading device of this type is shown in Figure 17.1 on page 290.

A slightly more complex version of this technique is the cross-pan, in which a moving subject leads to another moving subject. This requires that the two subjects cross paths. Cross-pans of this type have a choreographic quality: Attention skips from subject to subject motivated largely by convention; each change in subject drives the audience expectation that the new subject is important. In fact, this shot is often employed as a POV shot of a person searching for something. Movement is not restricted to one direction only (as in the examples of the car and the leaves). In fact, the direction of the pan can change completely, going first in one direction and then in the opposite direction without pause. If the action is sustained — for example, a dance in a ballroom — cross-pans can work like a perpetual motion, moving from couple to couple indefinitely. Figure 17.2 illustrates the basic crossing pattern.

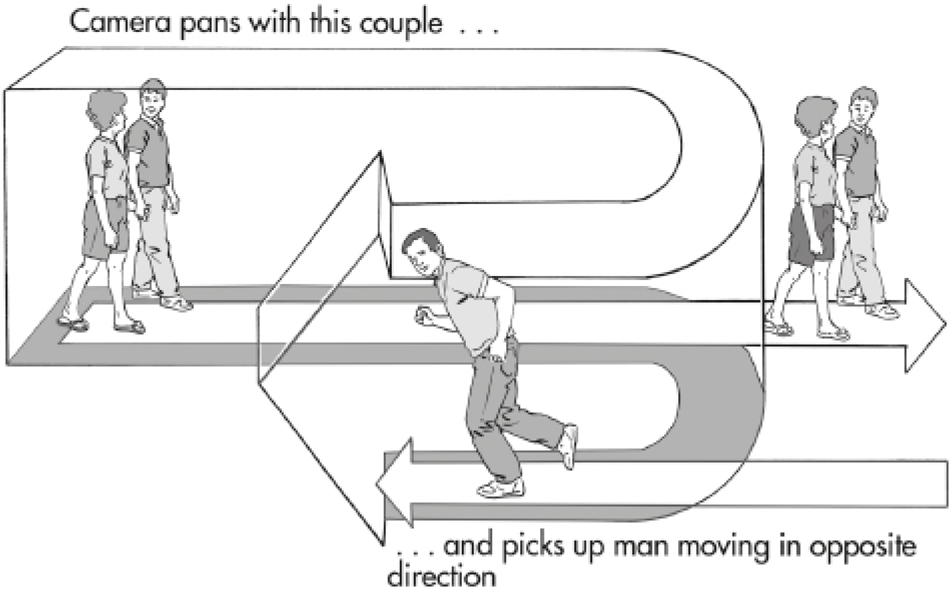

Camera pans with this couple . . .
. . . and picks up man moving in opposite direction

Figure 17.2

Panning to Emphasize Depth

Though the pan generally moves our attention horizontally or vertically across the frame it can also be used to lead our attention to near and far elements staged in depth. Figure 17.3 illustrates a pan shot that begins with a boy in the background running down a street towards the camera. The camera pans with the runner as he turns a comer and moves left to right until he goes behind the woman seated in the car in the extreme foreground.

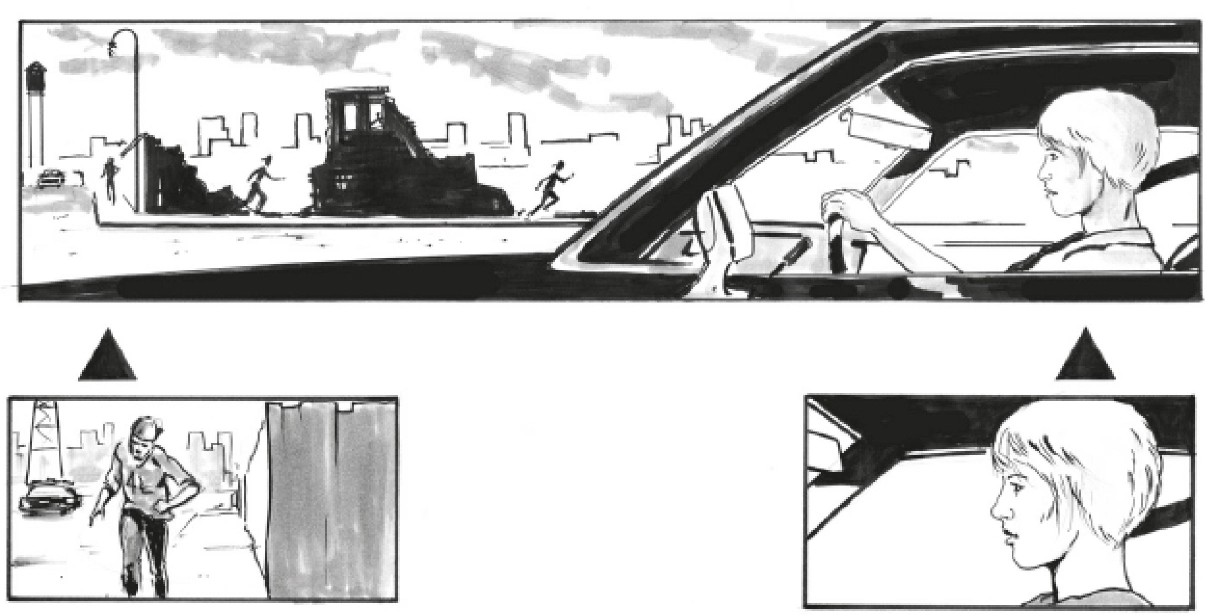


Figure 17.3: Depth shifts from background to foreground.

Panning for Logical Connection

In addition to its use in following action, the pan also can serve as a device to connect elements in the frame, automatically suggesting a logical relationship. When the pan moves from one point of interest to another it poses the question: “What is the connection between these two subjects?” Depending on the narrative strategy, the connection may be immediately clear or the filmmaker might create narrative motion by withholding the answer until later. Either way, the pan juxtaposes elements in a way that clearly makes the connection worthy of our interest.

Summary

The pan is an extremely versatile tool that seems to have fallen out of favor. Many contemporary filmmakers prefer the cut as a way to connect space and story elements so that they will have greater freedom when editing. As a result, their use of space is restricted and may have a choppy look.

The next time you are at a location where there is activity — the grocery store, the parking lot of a shopping center, or on line at a movie theater —

imagine a scene including many of the images that surround you. Now imagine connecting these images by means of a continuous pan. You will probably be surprised at how the action around you overlaps and intersects. Inevitably, certain images will connect logically, but in some situations, you will use the pan to connect images based solely on their graphic compatibility and later realize that this has suggested logical connections that you hadn't thought of before.

NARRATIVE EXAMPLES

We now return to the narrative problem we last saw in Chapter 8. This was the sequence in which a boy is waking up in his bedroom while his sister gets ready for school, his mother fixes breakfast, and his father leaves the house for work. In the version storyboarded at the end of Chapter 8 only static shots were used. In this new version, the filmmaker decides to try a different storytelling style by using extensive pan shots.

Version One

The filmmaker utilizes two shorthand storytelling devices, which he will intercut. The film will open on a CU of the refrigerator and the many notes, letters, and cards attached to it with magnets. The camera will pan over these notes capturing fragments of messages and images. This will be intercut with a similar panning style framing specific articles on the floor of the boy's bedroom shown in Figure 17.4.

The storyboard begins in frame 1 with an overview of the refrigerator door with halftone lines describing the path of the camera. In the actual pan shot, the camera would only partially frame the messages:

1. A reminder of an appointment at the dentist.
2. A note from school to the boy's parents: "Dear Mr. and Mrs. Dreyfuss, Mark has been late to school six times in the last month. He's failed to hand in several assignments, and is already quite far behind in math. He explained his lateness was due to a nervous disorder. I asked him to bring a note from the doctor. . . ."
3. A postcard from Mr. Dreyfuss from a hotel in Chicago.

4. A second postcard from Mr. Dreyfuss still on a business trip.
5. A third postcard from Mr. Dreyfuss. We learn that he travels a great deal.
6. A one-panel cartoon torn from a page of *Good Housekeeping*.
7. A second note from school inquiring about the first note and requesting a meeting with Mr. and Mrs. Dreyfuss.

Under the refrigerator shot in frame 1, we hear Mrs. Dreyfuss in the kitchen asking her daughter if Mark is up yet. We learn from this simple pan that Mark has trouble in school and that his father is often away on business.

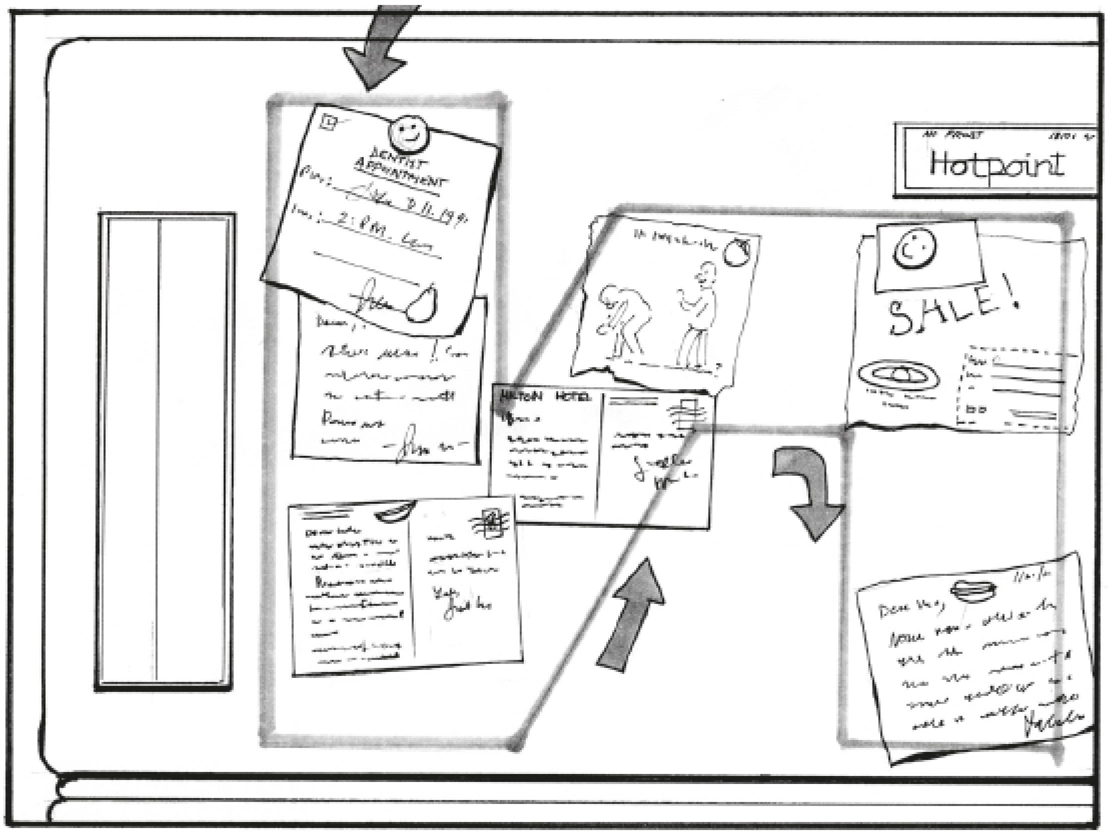
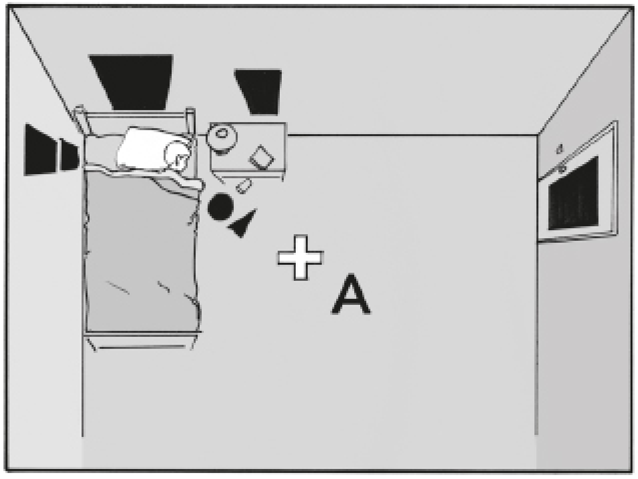


Figure 17.4: The camera opens in ECU on a refrigerator magnet — one of those “Have a nice day” faces. The camera pulls back until it covers a field of about the size of a postcard. The camera begins to pan over all the notes and cards attached to the refrigerator door. All the while, we hear kitchen sounds, and Mrs. Dreyfuss and her teenaged daughter speaking.

Version Two

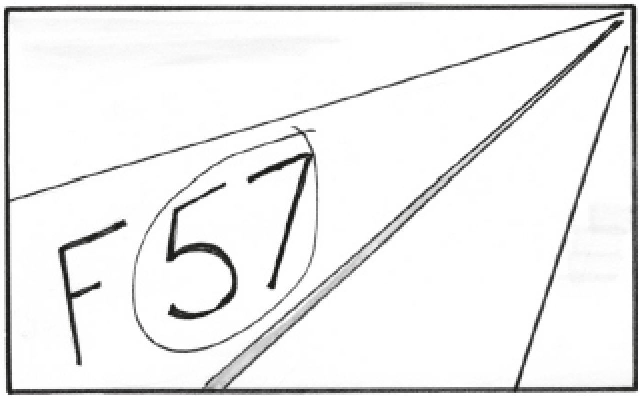
The filmmaker thinks that this first opening has merit as a visual idea, but unless this strategy is used under the titles at the opening of the movie it is too stylized for the opening, which is meant to carry a great deal of exposition.

A new idea is planned in which the extended pan over "storytelling" objects is moved to the boy's bedroom. In this setup, the camera is placed in a central location in the action so that it will cover nearly 180 degrees of space.



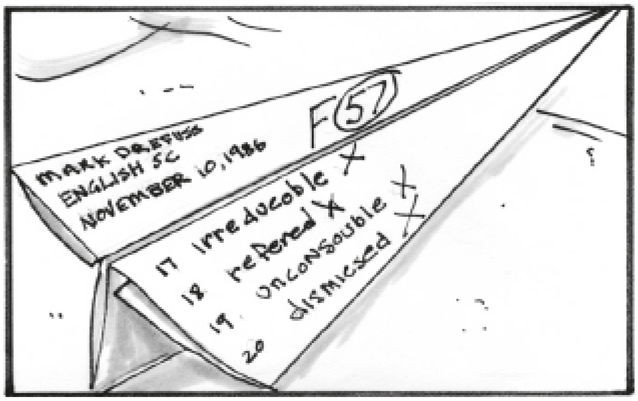
The aerial diagram illustrates the position of the separate elements in the storyboard. The camera is at position A. It begins pointing down at the triangle of the paper airplane on the floor, moves up the boy's arm to the posters behind him on the wall, moves across the wall left to right until it reaches the door, and then pans back to the boy in bed. The specific action is described in the following storyboards.

1



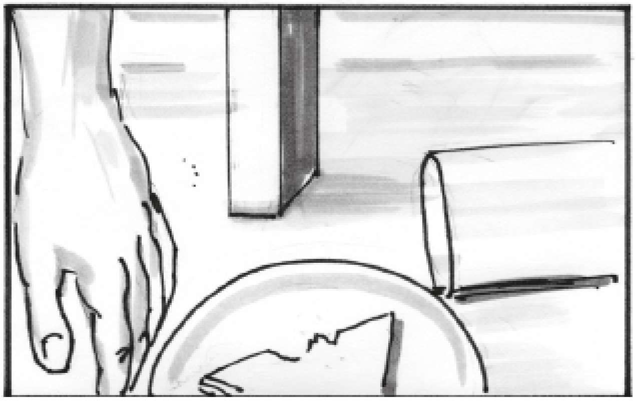
1. The movie opens on a big red F 57. The camera pulls back to reveal that this is written on the wing of a paper airplane to look like the markings on a fighter plane.

2


MARK DREYFUSS
ENGLISH 5C
NOVEMBER 10, 1986
F 57
17 irreducoble X
18 refered X
19 unconsouble X
20 dismicsed X

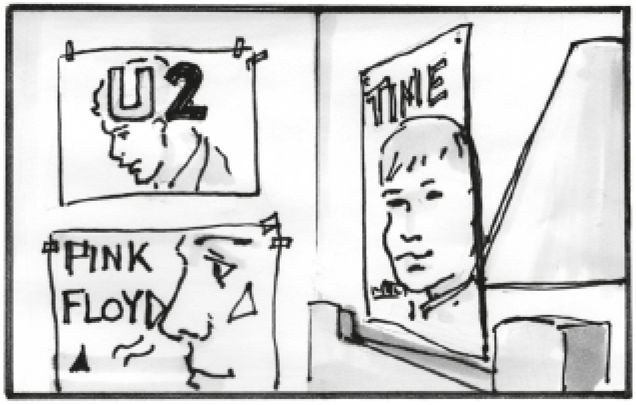
2. As the camera backs out we realize that the paper airplane is actually the paper from a spelling test and that the F 57 is not the boy’s idea of aeronautic identification but the failing grade given by his teacher. We see the boy’s name.

3



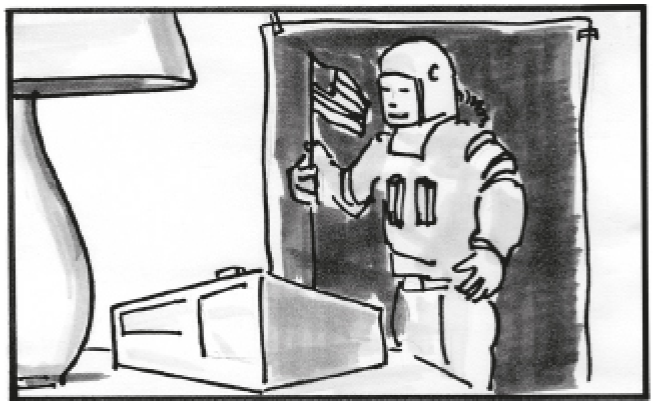
3. The camera pans over a nearby sandwich on a plate, an overturned drinking glass, and the boy’s hand hanging down alongside the bed.

4



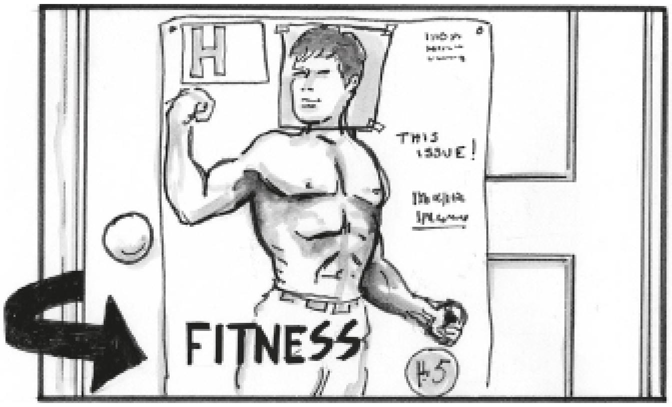
4. The camera pans up the boy’s arm but does not frame the boy’s face, continuing up and over the bed to several posters on the wall. In each poster, the boy has placed a photo of himself over the original photograph. This way he appears with the rock bands U2 and Pink Floyd and on the cover of *Time*.

5



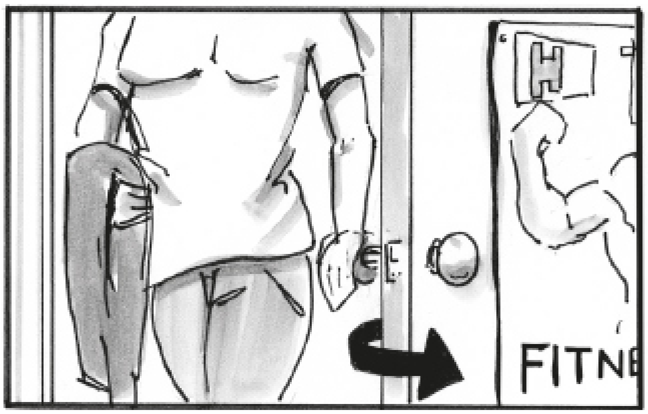
5. The camera continues to pan to the right over more posters, including one of the first man on the moon, but the face of Neil Armstrong has been covered by a photo of Mark Dreyfuss,

6



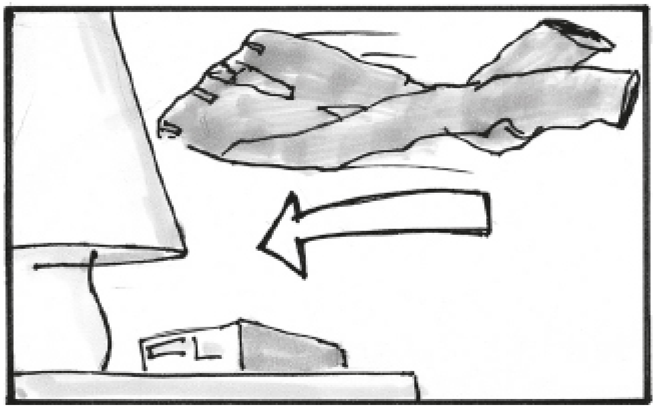
6. The camera continues to the bedroom door, where Mark has placed another of his photos on the body of a bodybuilder.

7



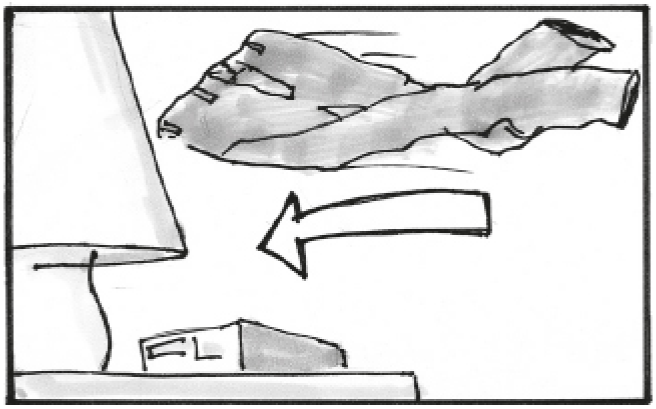
7. The door opens and Mark’s sister enters carrying a pair of blue jeans. She tosses these…

8



… and the camera follows the blue jeans through the air …

9



… until they land on Mark in bed. This is the first time we actually see him, but we recognize him from his photographs.

In the last few pages the pan was categorized in a number of ways:

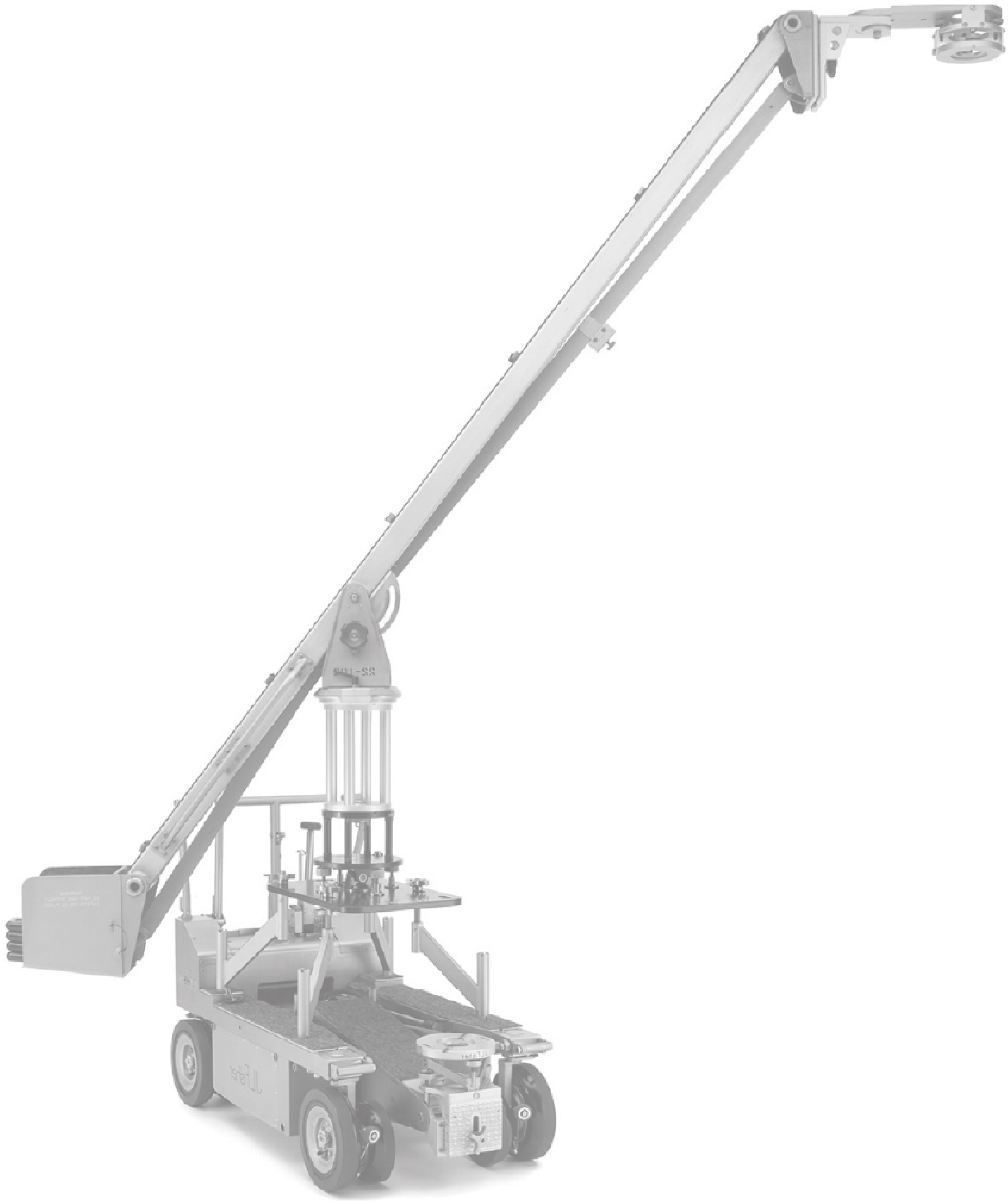
- **Panoramic Shot**
- **Panning to Reframe**
- **Panning to Cover Action**
- **Panning to Lead the Eye**
- **Panning to Emphasize Depth**
- **Panning for Logical Connection**

In general the use of the pan is the closest thing to how we look from point of interest to point of interest in daily experience. Because cinematography and editing only approximate vision and perception, graphic or artistic strategies are often interwoven with more deliberate imitation of how we see things. This was seen in the examples in the preceding pages. All movies are an approximation of human perception.

Neuroscience has begun to explain how the hardware of the eye works with the software of the brain to produce a coherent understanding perception. As of today, a comprehensive understanding of vision has not emerged. For most of the 20th century the popular explanation of motion pictures was the persistence of vision which has lived on in books on filmmaking, but not at all in the fields of psychology and neuroscience. Persistence of vision has not been an accurate description of the process of experiencing a series of still images as fluid motion for more than 70 years.

The pan is the closest thing in shot repertoire to a head turn, but certainly not the underlying perceptual process of the brain. First, the eye only sees a very small amount of reality in focus. If you look at any object right now the eye only sees a very small portion of your visual field in focus. The fully focused world you are looking at (including this page) is composed of lots of these spotlighted views that are experienced about 3–5 times a second. These are called saccades and refer to the quick movement of the eye between moments of fixation. There are also smooth pursuit eye movements that may be supplemented by saccadic action in the human visual system. A series of saccades with only a small portion of focused imagery are assembled in real time to produce a much larger focused area.

Saccadic suppression of image displacement is the reason we don’t see individual images while the brain is assembling the image we think we’re seeing when we see the world around us. It’s also the reason that unconscious blinking is also suppressed. The misinformation regarding how the brain processes these scattered and disconnected fragments of imagery is partially the result of the human eye being compared to a camera, the popular metaphor in film books and lore. A fascinating subject, crucial to our understanding of human consciousness, perception remains a mystery and the focus of intense study in the sciences.



J. L. Fisher Crane *Image courtesy of ThatCat Rentals, NYC*.

18 The Crane Shot

The crane shot is usually thought of as a strictly vertical movement normally called a boom shot, but actually, the crane is capable of moves in many directions, though the distinguishing factor is its vertical capability. Used in this way the crane shot is perhaps the least naturalistic move in the moving camera repertoire. It's not analogous to any perception in normal experience, since we rarely see the world from the privileged position that a towering crane move provides.

Crane shots are inherently majestic and hold our interest regardless of the subject because of the sheer physical pleasure of the move: The power of the exotic viewing angle and the seductive change of perspective draw us in. Used at the beginning of a sequence the crane shot emphasizes the sense of presence and establishes the geography of an environment at the same time. The crane move that enters a location is a "once upon a time" shot directing our attention from the general to the specific. Where the establishing pan shot moves across a wide expanse of space surveying a fictional world, the crane permits us to "feel" the dimensions of that world by penetrating space, further endorsing its reality through the illusion of depth.

The crane shot has many other uses besides the epic grandeur of the establishing shot. In Alfred Hitchcock's *Notorious*, the crane is used at a party to descend two stories from the ceiling of an enormous hall to a set of keys in Ingrid Bergman's hand. Here the purpose is to underscore the psychological tension that the keys represent in the story.

Another move of this type used to dramatize a character's anguish is the opening shot of Bernardo Bertolucci's *Last Tango in Paris*. Marlon Brando is walking on a sidewalk under an elevated train after the suicide of his wife. The camera reveals his torment by making a sudden rapid descent to a close-up of his upturned face as he screams at the sky.

Besides being used to move the camera within a shot, the crane can serve as a mobile tripod. The crane can rapidly deploy the camera within a scene for static shots that would normally require scaffolding or a tripod. During the studio production era in Hollywood, studio sets were the ideal location for a crane because even in small interiors, studio walls and ceilings were “wild,” meaning that they could be easily removed to access light or clear the viewpoint of the camera. The bulky Mitchell cameras of Hollywood’s golden era could be rapidly repositioned within a set, and the director was able to make fairly rapid adjustments to the position of the camera. Today, when most films are shot on real locations, this freedom of movement with a big crane is only possible outdoors, but the smart filmmaker who understands the varied uses of the crane will make use of it for more than just a few impressive introductory shots.

The Range of Motion

The crane’s range of motion depends on the type of crane, but generally, the camera can move up and down in an arc around its base. Included as a member of the crane family are jib arms and booms, which are added as accessories for many dollies. Because the dolly can move laterally during a shot, the range of motion is greatly increased by adding the vertical capability of the boom. Figure 18.1 shows the full range of motion for a remote-control type crane operating from a fixed point. When the terrain permits, a crane can also drop below the base, very nearly doubling its vertical range.

When the base is in motion the crane can continue to move vertically, thereby greatly increasing the area covered. A crane or boom arm can be attached to a camera car or any other stable moving platform to allow for vertical movement alongside a moving subject. Figure 18.2 shows a remote control crane moving on track while simultaneously making a vertical move.

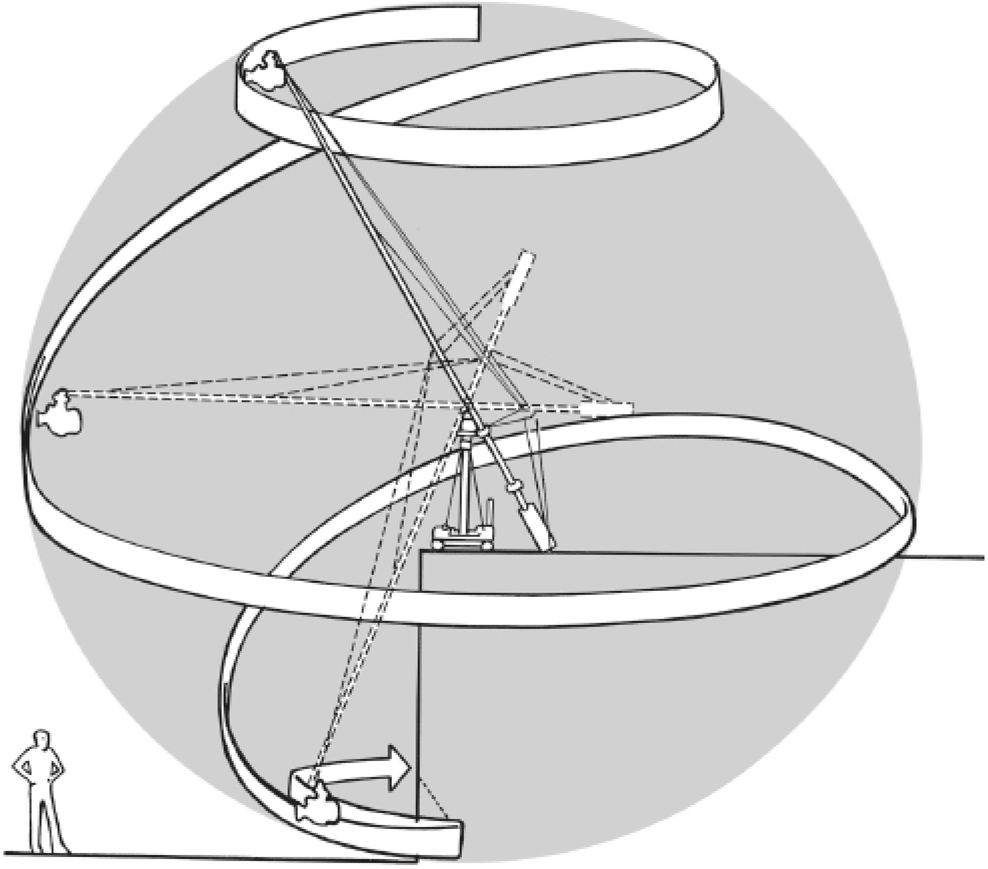


Figure 18.1: Range of motion.

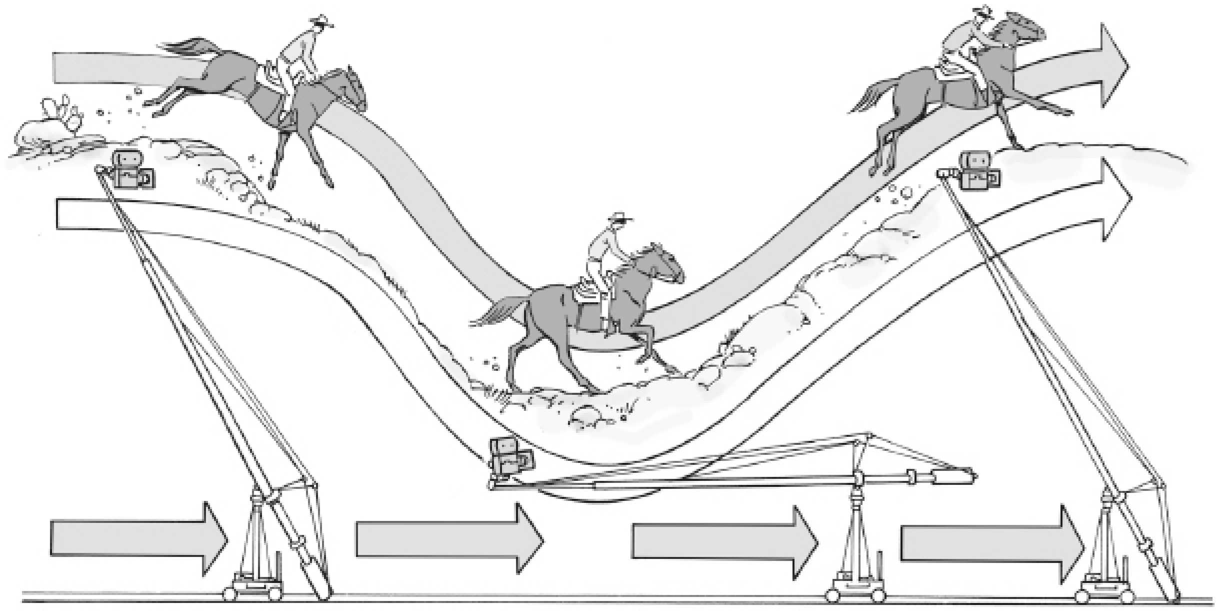


Figure 18.2: Simultaneous vertical and horizontal movement.

The crane can also be an inquisitive observer. Not only can it rise to get the overview of a scene, but it can go from the overview to the details of a scene and then return to the wide shot. A crane can move over an obstacle like a fence or a wall. Figure 18.3 shows the kind of gymnastic movement that can be accomplished with newer remote-control cranes.

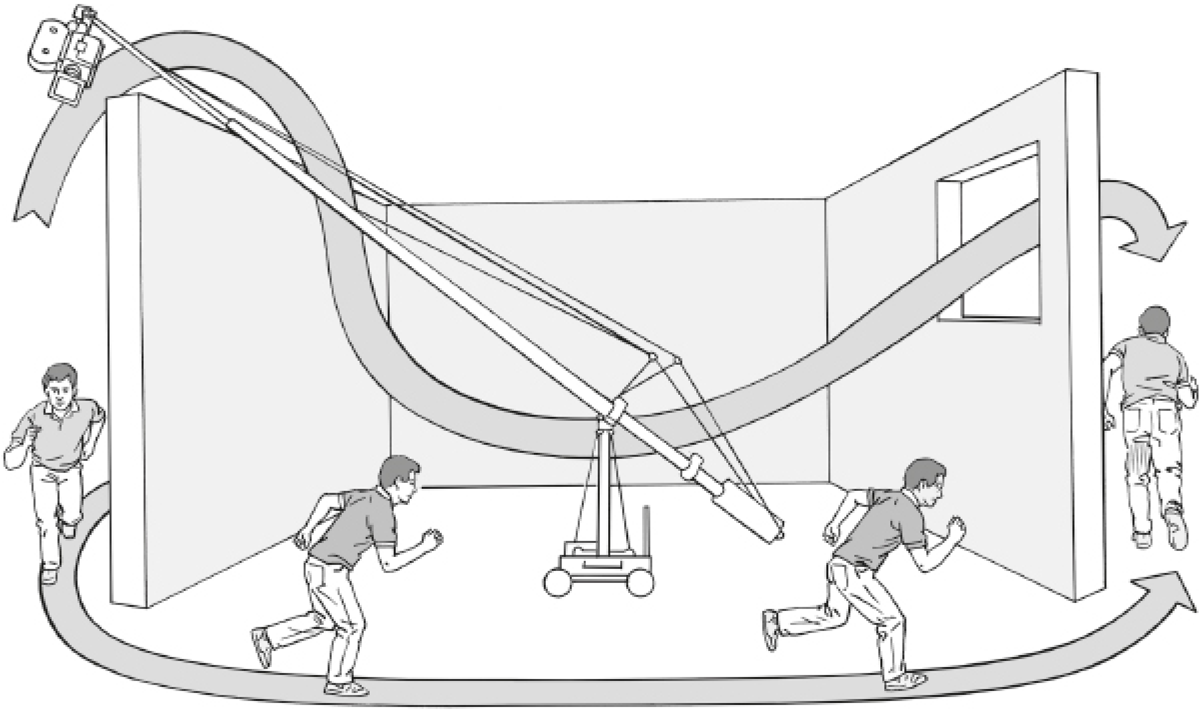


Figure 18.3: The inquisitive observer.

Point of View

A crane move can reinforce the subjective feel of a shot by imitating the general path of a subject, as shown in Figure 18.4. As the subject goes up a hill to look over the crest, the camera follows from behind. Since information is revealed to us as it is revealed to the subject, we see things from his general viewpoint.

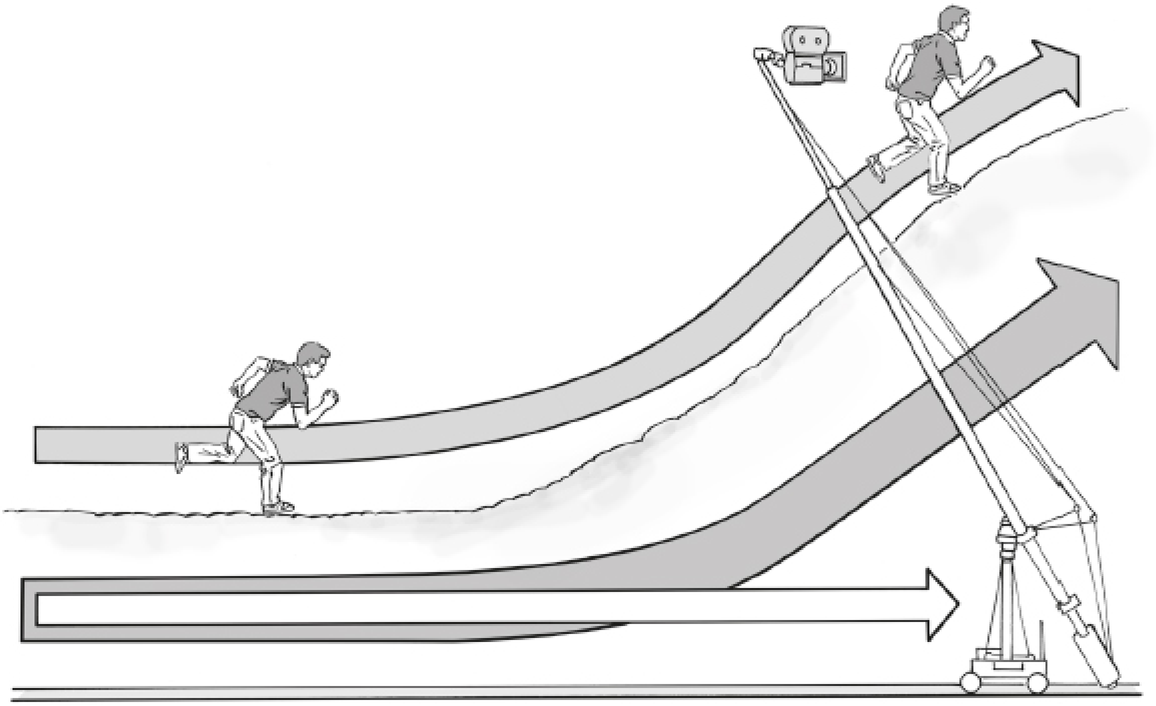


Figure 18.4: Point of view.

Following a subject's line of sight doesn't have to cover a great distance. A boom arm on a dolly, which is still essentially a crane shot, can imitate a person dropping to a crouching position. Figure 18.5 shows a fairly simple move that would encourage the viewer to interpret the shot as the view seen by the man looking under the garage door. The camera would frame the crouching subject, using him as a framing device, or continue to move past him toward the object of interest.

Like all long moving shots, the crane shot can be used as a sequence shot moving from one point of interest to another. This can be done to make comparisons. For example, for a film set in South Africa the crane can move from a close-up of a cross atop a beautiful church steeple and then slowly descend past this symbol of Christianity to the all-white congregation of Afrikaners below as they turn a black couple away from the doors of the church. This is only the most obvious type of irony, but it illustrates the cinematic relationship between the conceptual use of imagery and technique. Naturally, more subtle comparisons can be made, permitting the viewer greater freedom to interpret, but the point is that the crane shot is more than a tool for pictorial invention.

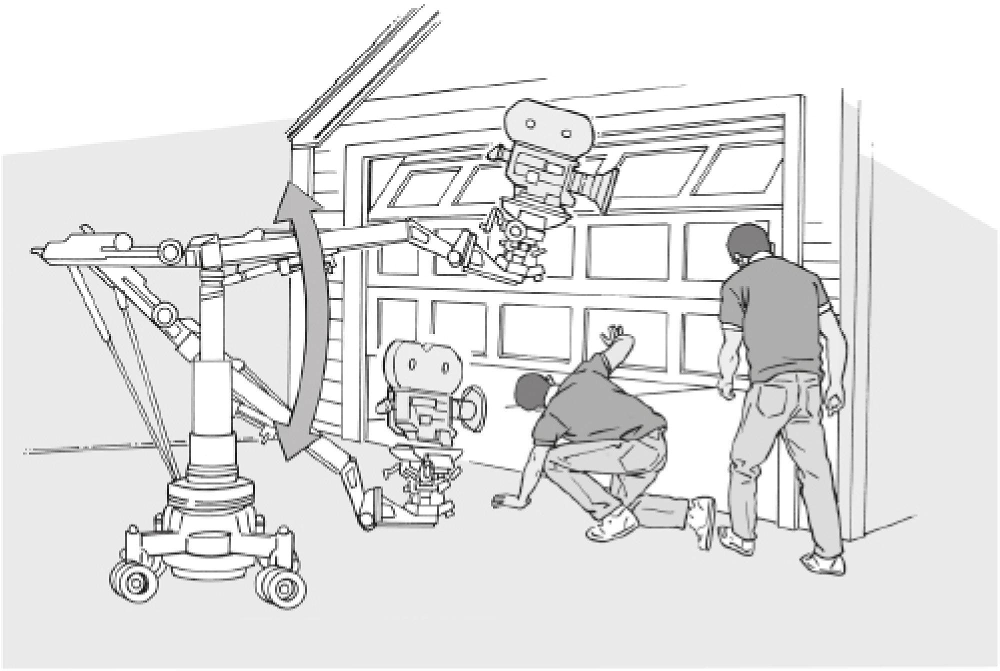
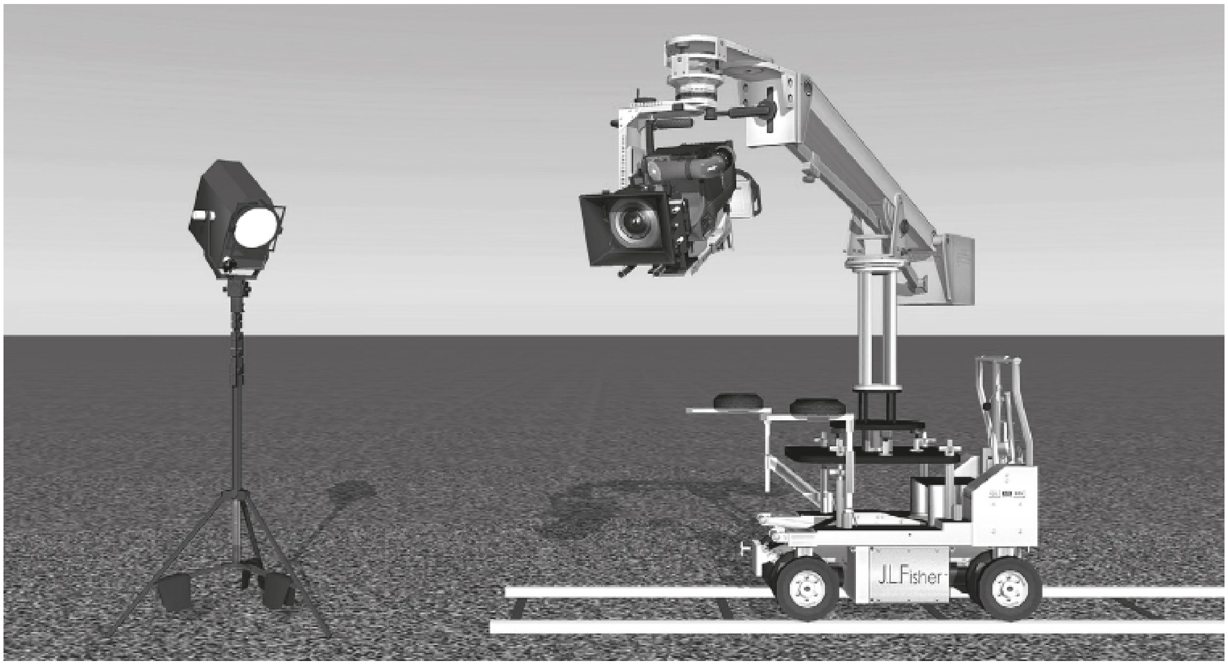


Figure 18.5: Point of view.

Learning the Moves

Studying movies and breaking down sequences is always a good way to learn how to use the moving camera, but that's not the same as doing it yourself. To make and test your own moves, we are back to computer previs, unless you own a crane. In FrameForge and other software, you can choose an actual crane such as the Chapman or Jimmy Jibs. While the software has a learning curve, this is the fastest and most accurate way to learn how to move the camera. It's also the best way to show a production designer or cinematographer what you are looking for. If the software is being used in the art department, then the design of camera moves can be collaborative. Once your location has been created in 3D in FrameForge or iClone you can turn out a few versions of the camera move and actor choreography in an hour.



FrameForge Dolly

MoVI & Segway *Image courtesy of Upper Cut Productions, UK*

19 The Tracking Shot

The tracking shot is used to follow a subject, connect story points, and explore space. This can be a simple shot framing one subject or a complex sequence shot that connects multiple story elements varying the staging and composition in a single flowing movement. However, even the most intricate tracking shots can be understood more easily if we look at the narrative and pictorial building blocks on which they're based.

The Circle of Action and the Moving Camera

The circle of dramatic action is almost the same for the moving camera as it is for the stationary camera we looked at in Chapter 13. For instance, if there is a ballroom dance and the camera is on the floor surrounded by dancers, it is *in the action*. If the camera dollies along a balcony to cover the action of the couples dancing some distance away, it is *outside the action*. This would also be the case if the camera were stationary. The difference between the stationary and the traveling camera is that the traveling camera can move into or out of the action within a single shot. In story terms, this means moving from the general to the specific view of things or vice versa. This change between the interior and the exterior of the circle of action is one of the most useful features of the moving camera; it enables the filmmaker to structure story elements visually.

The Subject-to-Camera Distance

In addition to entering or exiting, the circle of action the camera encompasses includes moving towards or away from a subject to shape our identification with that subject. Moreover, a moving shot develops over time so that the degree of emphasis is variable within a shot.

By comparison, a stationary close-up has only one graphic value for the length of the shot, but a moving close-up shot can include a range of values from a wide close-up to an extreme close-up. Depending on whether the move is towards or away from the subject, the general increase or decrease in intimacy (or any other effect of the framing) evolves during the shot.

Planning for the Tracking Shot

We can identify the various ways a tracking shot can be planned if we think in terms of, first, the traveling camera's relationship to the circle of action; and second, the subject-to-camera distance. These two factors determine the type of spatial relationship that exists between the camera and the subject of any shot. Regardless of whether the camera is inside or outside the circle of action, the subject-to-camera distance may increase, decrease, or remain the same.

As discussed in Chapter 5, one of the ways a scene in a script can be broken down into shots is by asking what the point of view of the scene is and what the appropriate emotional distance between the viewer and the subject is. Of course, before analyzing a scene you may have a moving shot in mind that came to you while reading the script. Even so, it might be helpful to make a list of the elements that are to be emphasized in the shot you imagine. If you draw a schematic of the tracking shot, you can write the key moments along the path of the camera. This could include important lines of dialogue or specific choreography for the actor. While this type of planning can be used to organize a specific shot, thinking in terms of the dramatic circle of action is useful when trying to find a shot to record complex action. In the remainder of this chapter, we will look at the basic traveling camera strategies to help build a vocabulary of moves.

Tracking to Introduce a Subject or Location

A tracking shot can investigate a location or subject, revealing it to us slowly by focusing on individual details of the overall location. This can be done from inside or outside the circle of action. In one version, the camera begins in close-up, pulling back to a wide view so that we move from the specific detail to the general outline. For example, the camera moves down a sidewalk on a deserted street of shops. At first, the view is in CU so that we see only peeling paint, broken glass, and other signs of decay at a bakeshop. Details of this first store reveal the signs of a failed family business. The camera pulls back, tracking past dilapidated storefronts and vacant businesses. "Closed" or "Out of Business" signs are in many of the windows. A homeless person sleeps in the door of an empty store. The signs of economic disaster are revealed slowly until an entire street is in view. In this way, camera movement relates the citywide economic depression to the individual level by first showing us the bakeshop.

Often a tracking shot follows a lateral path along subjects deployed over a large area, such as at a city park or cars in traffic — for example, Godard's long traveling shot past car after car in *Weekend*. While it may be convenient and appropriate to move along a straight path, a tracking shot is not restricted to a straight line. The camera can also turn corners, move forward and backward, come to a halt and begin to move again, change speeds, cross its own path, frame subjects in close-up or wide shot, or move through windows or doors or any other visual scheme the filmmaker can conceive and the crew can execute.

Tracking at the Same Speed as the Subject

The most familiar use of the tracking shot is to follow two or more people in conversation. When the subject and the camera are moving at the same speed and the subject-to-camera distance does not change, the moving shot is the compositional equivalent of a static shot. The camera can track directly ahead of or behind the subjects, it can track on a parallel path in line with the subjects, or it can parallel their path from a position slightly ahead or slightly behind them. Basic tracking angles are shown in Figure 19.1. The subjects can also be framed in full figure, medium shot, or close-up, placing the camera inside or outside the action. This same parallel tracking shot is used frequently to record conversations in cars or on horseback, boats, or any other conveyance. The shot is also useful in action sequences in which car-mounted cameras are often used to move alongside fast-moving subjects.

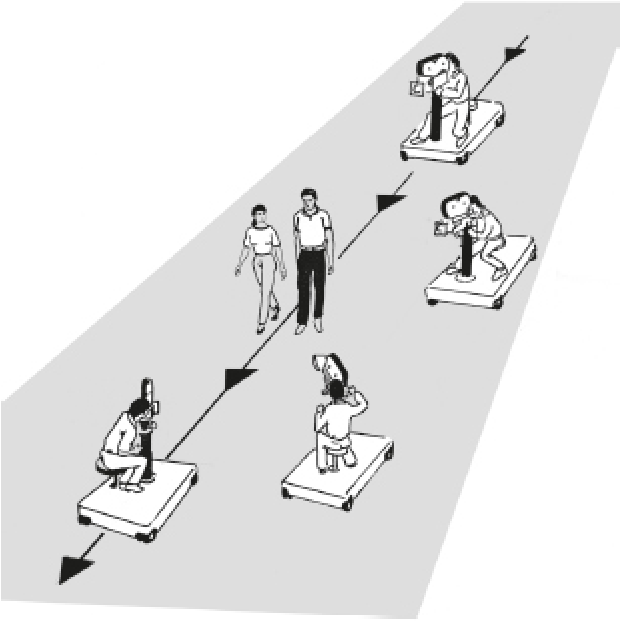


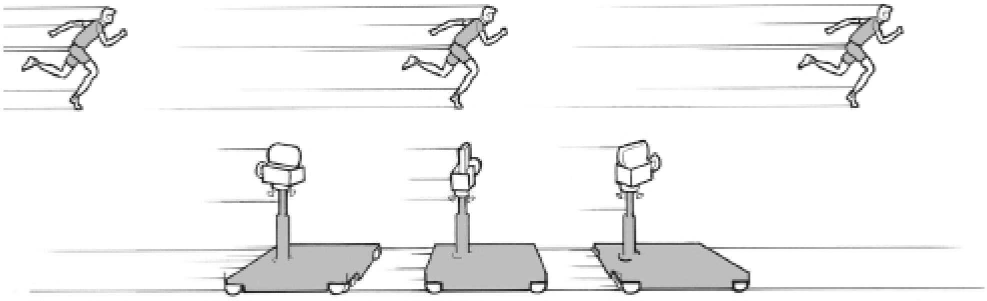
Figure 19.1

Tracking Faster or Slower Than the Subject

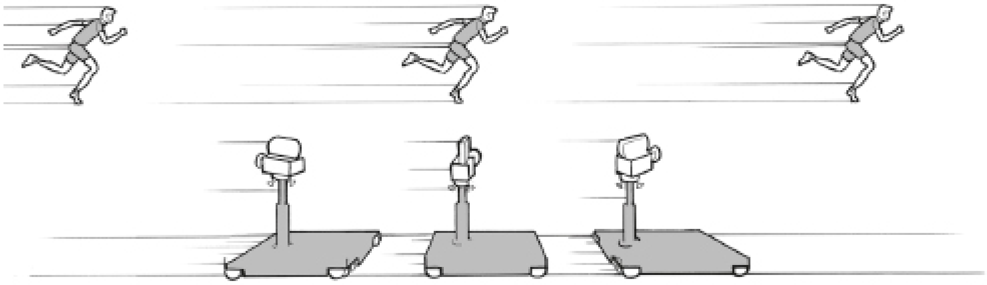
This is really a variation on the parallel tracking shot. The only difference is that the camera is moving at a different speed from that of the subject. In this way, the subject will approach the camera as it moves or be left behind when the camera moves faster (Figure 19.2). This gives the filmmaker the ability to let the subject enter or exit the circle of action as the camera is moving.

If we use a tracking shot to show that a runner is losing a race, the camera can move slightly faster than the runner, passing him during the course of the shot. If we want to show the runner winning, obviously we would have the runner going faster than the camera. In an action sequence, this is a more dynamic shot than the conventional parallel tracking shot because it develops while it's on the screen as the subject travels across the frame. This holds our interest more than a shot in which the camera and subject move at the same speed. Also, when the camera is moving at a different speed from that of the subject the perspective is accentuated by three planes of motion — background, subject, and foreground — rather than two planes of motion, which is the case when the camera and subject move at the same speed. Using three planes of motion increases the sense of depth.

Figure 19.2



The camera moves slower than the subject does.



The camera moves faster than the subject does.

Not only can the subject and camera move at different speeds, but they can change speeds within a shot. When recording conversations, the camera can keep pace with the subjects and then slow down as the subjects move ahead of the camera, leaving it behind. Another variation is to have the subjects overtake the moving camera and then move along at the same speed. Still another version might have the camera at rest as the couple approaches, then begin to move along with them at the same speed throughout their conversation and have them leave the camera behind at the end of the scene. All these variations have the same purpose: to create the sense that we have eavesdropped on a real conversation that continues after the subjects move on.

Moving Towards or Away From a Subject

So far, we have been interested in parallel tracking. The camera can also move directly towards or away from a subject or object, increasing or diminishing its importance within the context of a story. The basic move is illustrated in Figure 19.3.

A dolly move towards a subject's face can be used to emphasize a character's moment of realization. This familiar convention is often set up as a cut on the look. For instance, a woman arrives at a bar and finds her husband embracing another woman. There are three possible camera moves: 1) The camera dollies into a CU of the woman looking at her husband, 2) the camera dollies towards the husband, and 3) both dolly shots are used sequentially.

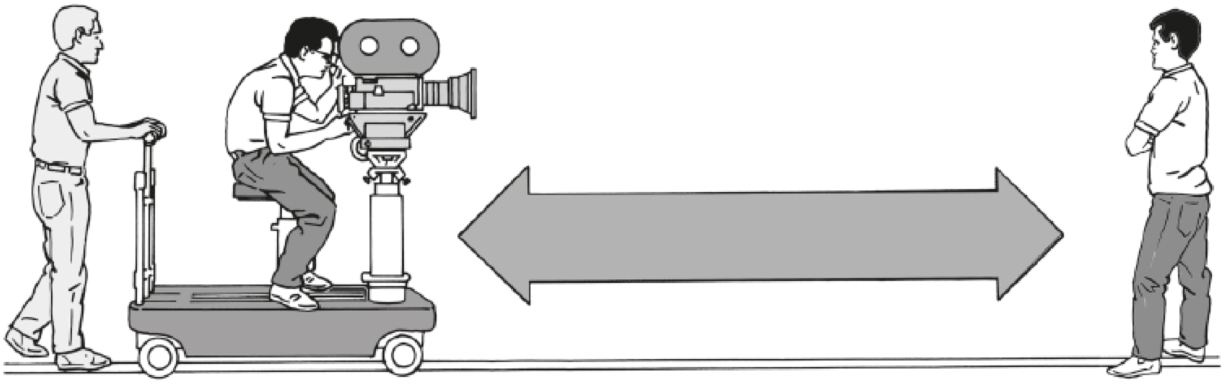


Figure 19.3: The push-in or the pullback.

A dolly shot can also deemphasize a subject by pulling back. This tends to isolate the subject as well. For example, a woman is standing on a railroad platform as the train pulls away with her only child, a daughter, onboard. Mounted on a train the camera might back away from the woman on the platform, indicating her sense of loss as her daughter departs.

Perhaps the most familiar use of the backtracking shot or pullback is as an introductory shot at the beginning of a scene. This familiar technique draws a relationship between the object at the beginning of the shot and the location in which it is set. In a typically commentative use, the camera might pull back from a worn but expensive topcoat to reveal that it is on a chair in a squalid one-room apartment. This ironic setup tells us that the owner of the coat, formerly a wealthy businessman, has lost everything except this last possession from better days.

Varying the Camera Angle Within the Shot

Figure 19.4 illustrates a typical tracking setup for a dialogue scene. In this parallel tracking arrangement, the camera moves alongside the couple. The height of the camera is slightly below eye level, but because the camera is several feet away, the angle of view is indistinguishable from an eye-level shot, as shown in storyboard frame A. If the scene builds to an angry exchange between the players, the director might want to cut to a lower angle framing for a more dynamic composition. Normally this would mean cutting to a new angle. An alternative solution would be to move the actors closer to the camera, forcing it to tilt up to include the actors' heads in a medium shot. Storyboard frame B shows the result of moving the couple to within a few feet of the lens. The same effect is produced if the camera dollies to the couple.

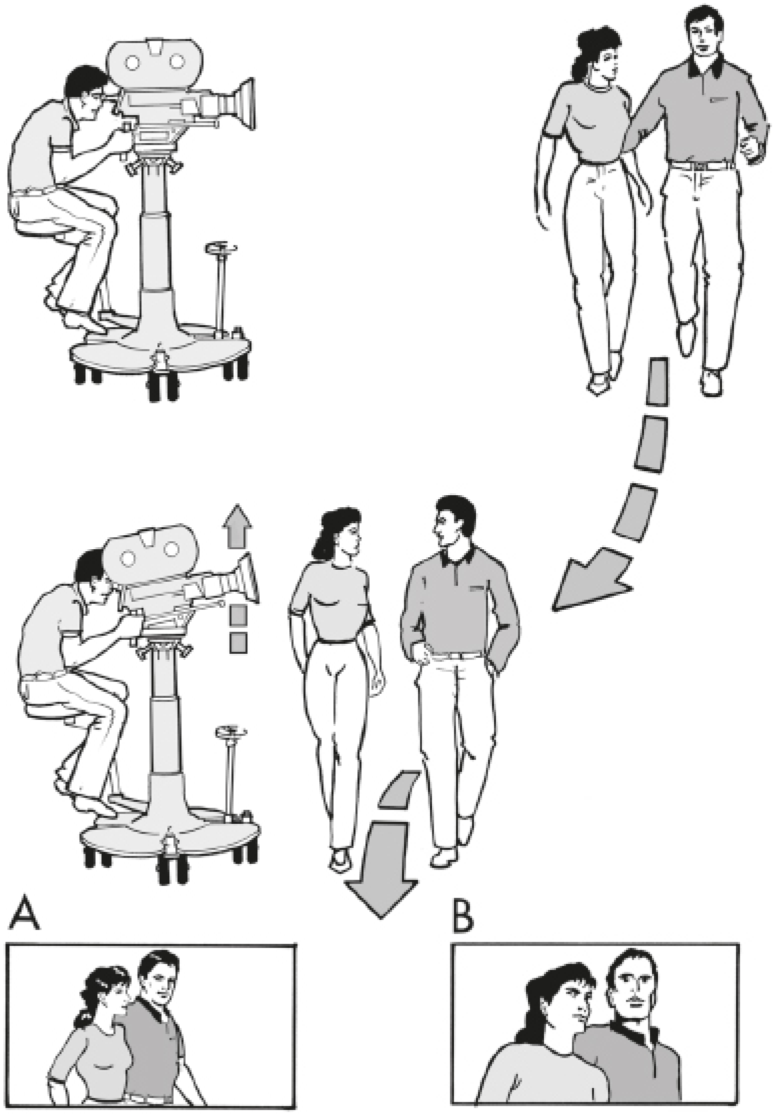


Figure 19.4: To combine low and high angles in a single tracking shot, change the camera-to-subject distance. As the subjects get closer to the dolly, the camera must be tilted up to include them in the frame. The change in angle is shown in storyboard frames A and B.

Tracking Around a Subject

The camera can surround the dramatic circle of action by completing a full circle with the subject at the center, as shown in Figure 19.5. Extreme examples of this appear in similar ways in two films, Woody Allen's *Hannah and Her Sisters* and Brian De Palma's *The Untouchables*. In both films, a completely circular track surrounds people seated at a table. Even when the camera movement is slow, the shot is designed to draw attention away from the characters as individuals so that we will evaluate the situation as a whole. In *The Untouchables*, the circular tracking shot symbolizes that the four crimefighters, individuals from diverse backgrounds, have finally become a team. The camera surrounds them, unifying them in space.

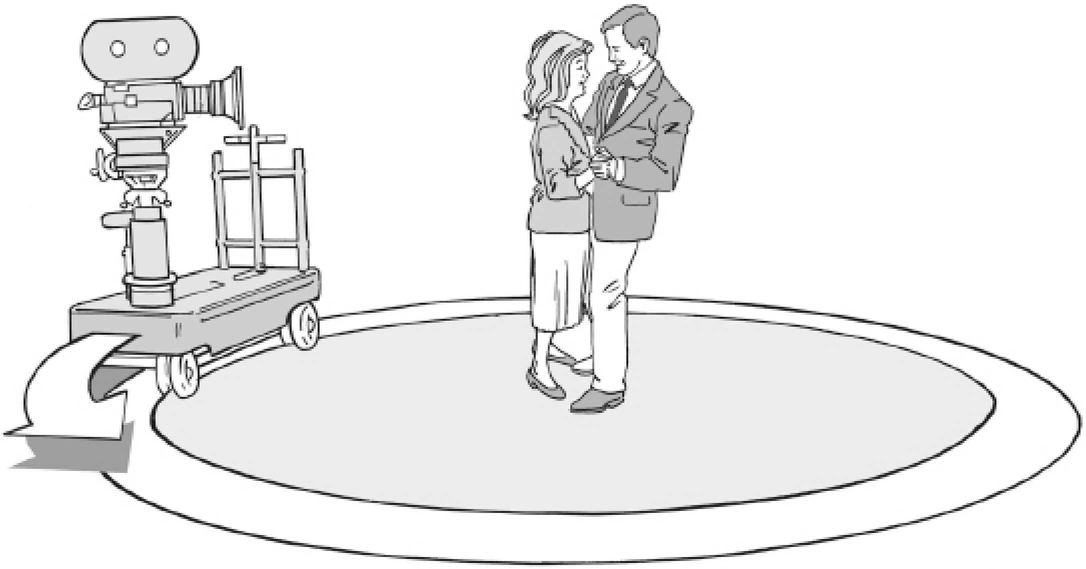


Figure 19.5

Allen’s use of a similar circular tracking shot is parenthetical. Here, the camera circles the sisters seated at a table so rapidly that it overpowers their conversation. The shot dismisses their observations and opinions, putting them on display for our inspection. The viewer is put in a superior position, knowing that what the sisters are saying reveals what they don’t know about themselves.

Still another use of the circular tracking shot is seen in Martin Scorsese’s *The Color of Money* (1986), the follow-up (25 years later) to Robert Rossen’s study of a pool hustler in *The Hustler* (1961). In this case, the camera is used to convey the character’s state of mind. The camera circles the character, Fast Eddie, in CU framing as he enters the first world-class competition since his retirement 20 years before. He is momentarily overcome by the rush of excitement, and the movement of the camera conveys Eddie’s feelings in a single move.

Combining Interior and Exterior Spaces

The change from adjacent interior and exterior locations is usually handled by a cut between shots of each space. This eliminates the problem of matching interior and exterior lighting, which can vary greatly. Photographed separately, the two locations need not actually be near each other, so a studio interior can be combined with a real outdoor location halfway around the world. This is a decided advantage from the production manager’s point of view, but artistically the separation of exteriors and interiors diminishes spatial unity.

The alternative is to move the camera from interior to exterior or vice versa in a continuous move. Here are some of the possibilities:

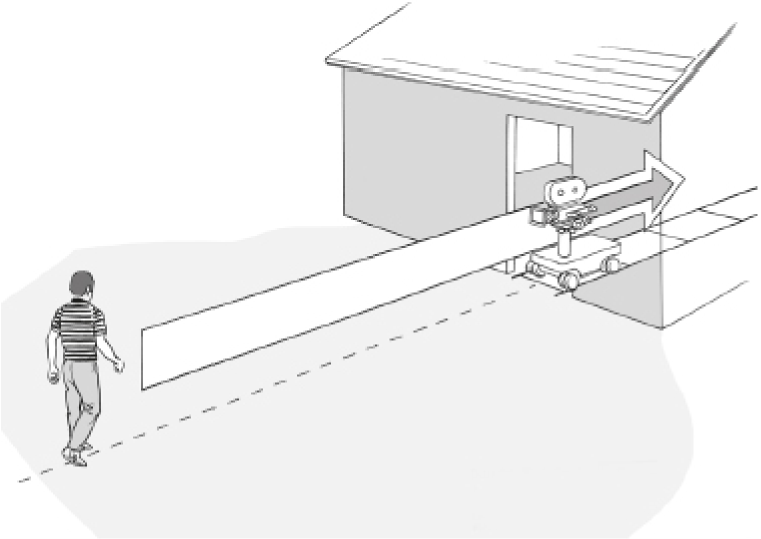


Figure 19.6

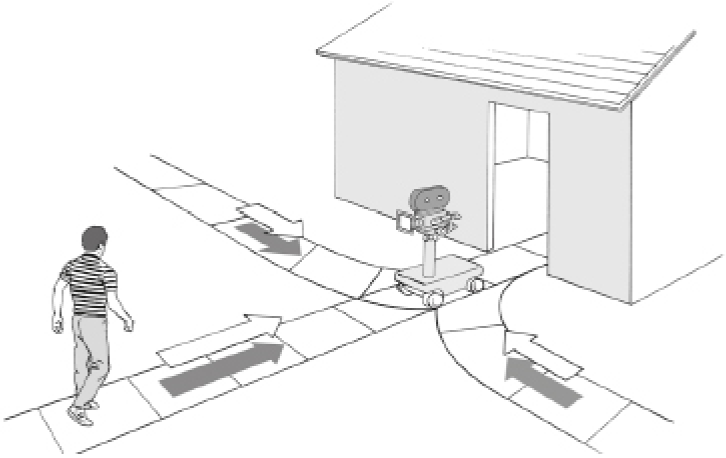


Figure 19.7

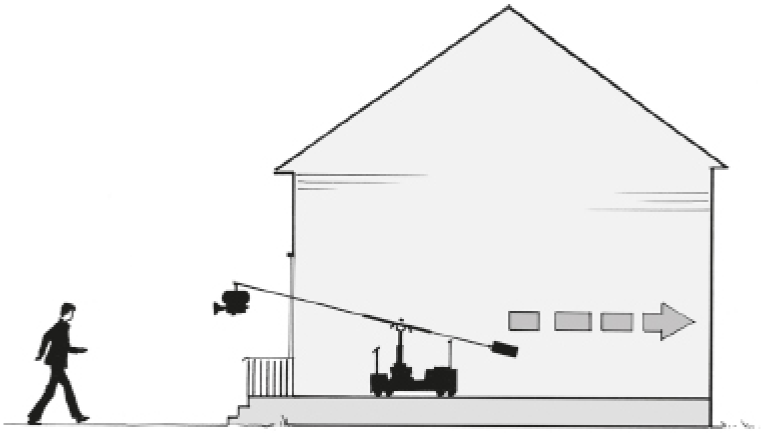


Figure 19.8

Entering an Interior

The dolly is set up so that the camera tracks in front of the subject as shown in Figure 19.6. The camera is stationary as the subject approaches. When the subject is within a few feet of the camera, the dolly is pulled backward into the room, followed by the subject.

The camera can also precede the subject from any angle or path using curved track or a temporary platform of boards or plywood. Typical angles of entry are shown in Figure 19.7. If the move is small, another variation could add a jib arm to the dolly. The dolly would remain inside the house on the level floor of the interior space, and the jib arm and camera would be extended out the door. As the subject approaches the door the dolly is pulled back until the jib arm is inside the doorway, waiting for the subject to follow. One advantage of this setup is shown in Figure 19.8. Because there are steps up to the front door, a dolly would have to be placed on a ramp with a gentle slope. Apart from the time it would take to build the ramp, it would be a difficult shot to execute smoothly. The jib arm solves the problem and offers considerable flexibility if there is a need to change the staging.

Even without the jib arm, the camera and dolly can be placed indoors and still connect exterior and interior space using a dolly move. If the camera is close to the doorframe, it can be aimed outside to frame what looks like an exterior shot, since the doorframe is not seen. As the subject approaches the door from outside, the camera pulls back deeper into the room until the doorframe and the room are included in the shot. An additional alternative is to use a zoom lens to cover the subject's approach, gradually widening out to frame the subject. Eventually, the shot will include part of the doorframe and part of the room.

Shooting an Interior From the Exterior Position

It is also possible to move from an exterior to an interior space by allowing the subject to pass a moving camera, as shown in Figure 19.9. In this case, the camera pans with the subject to the edge of the doorway but remains outside. The subject enters the interior, and the camera photographs the scene inside while remaining outside. With the right choice of lens and staging, the results will appear as though the camera had entered the location.

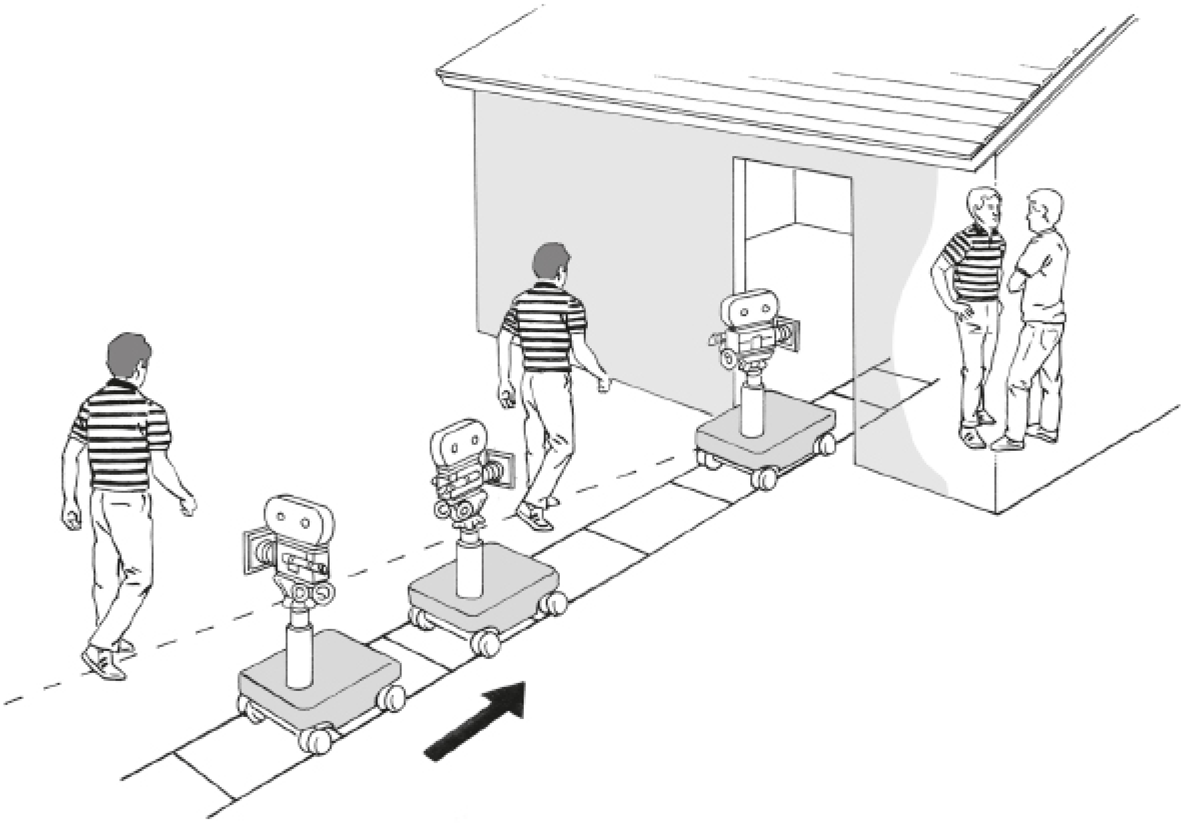


Figure 19.9: Shooting an interior from an exterior position. The camera dollies and pans with the subject, but remains outside to shoot the interior.

Shooting Through Windows to Combine Interiors and Exteriors

In this last setup, the traveling camera is placed in an interior location. The camera frames a subject through a window as he approaches the house (Figure 19.10). The camera is placed close enough to the window glass so that the window frame is not visible and the viewer is unaware that the camera is inside the room. As the camera pans to follow the subject entering through a doorway, the camera quickly pans past the wall and doorframe, following the subject into the house. At this moment, the viewer realizes that he’s been watching the subject from inside a room. With this arrangement, track can be laid inside the room so that the moving shot can continue in the interior space.

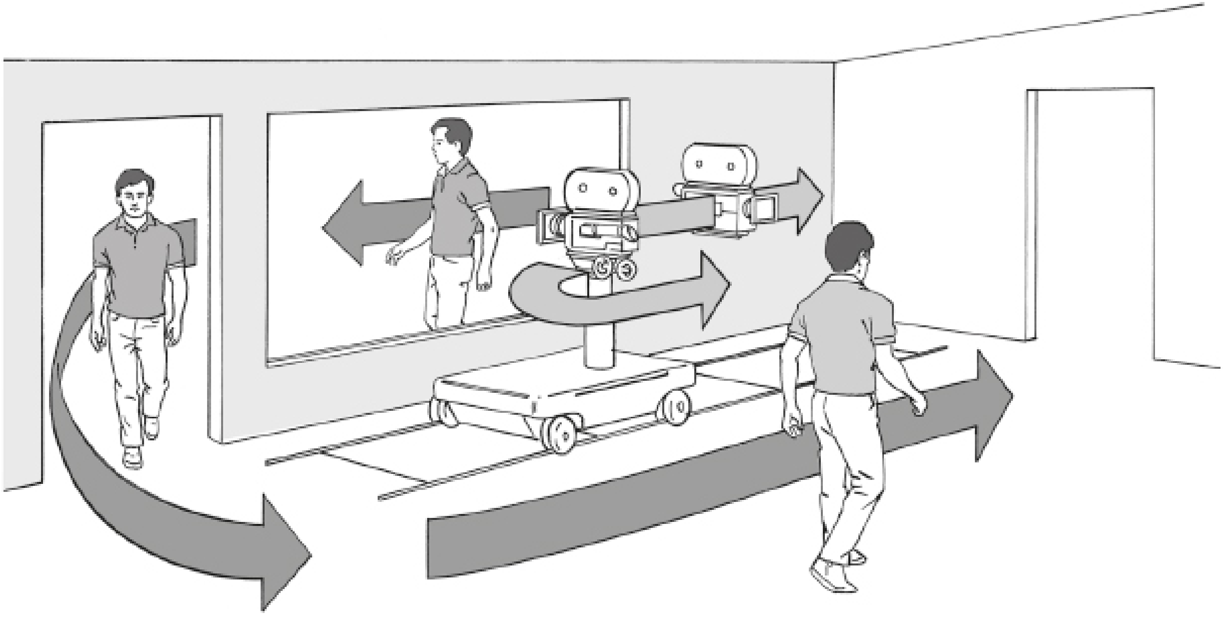


Figure 19.10: Shooting through windows to combine interiors and exteriors.

Obviously the positioning of the camera is dependent on the room and the action of the subject, but the principle in the last three shots is the same: The selective view of the camera can make it seem as though the camera has crossed from an interior to an exterior (or the reverse) while following a subject.

Traveling Shots and Camera Angles

The traveling camera increases the effect of all other perspective cues that help us judge distance. Since we identify camera angles by the way in which they render perspective, it stands to reason that the traveling camera will intensify our perception of space for any angle. In the chapter on camera angles, it was established that three-point perspective provided the greatest amount of information about the spatial relations for any of the possible views of an object in space. Similarly, the traveling camera can move through one, two, or three planes of movement. To move in three planes simultaneously the camera must move forward or backward while moving vertically and horizontally. If the camera is performing this type of movement while framing an object in three-point perspective, the maximum degree of depth will be achieved for any given scene. The use of any foreground elements or other pictorial or compositional devices that help the viewer understand spatial relationships will further increase the sense of depth.

Viewer Placement and the Moving Camera

Placement, as described in Chapter 14, is the movement of the viewer to different viewing positions in a scene through changes in camera angle. This was compared to choreography, because the viewer experiences a whole range of kinetic and physical effects as carefully arranged as a dance performance. Shot-flow choreography is present in any sequence of shots, but it is most palpable when the camera is in motion.

A moving shot may pass through several angles of view or present only one angle of view during the length of a shot. When following a subject at a fixed distance, the angle of the shot does not change. But if the camera approaches or retreats from the subject, the camera angle will change if the camera also moves up or down, left or right. Directors interested in exploiting the "pull" of this type of perspective shift will learn to stage action to force the camera to move along more than one axis or move around objects to include a range of views.

We can represent the perspective shifts of camera movement in drawings I call "perspective tunnels." This type of diagram is really an extension of the "*Quattrocento* Cube," the term used to describe the conception of the picture space in a painting or drawing that began with the development of linear perspective in the Renaissance.

Two well-known traveling shots are illustrated in Figure 19.11. First is the long descending crane shot in Alfred Hitchcock's *Notorious*. The camera descends two stories to end in CU on a set of keys in Ingrid Bergman's hand. A more complex move is shown in the long crane move into the El Rancho cabaret in *Citizen Kane*. The actual shot was done using a miniature for the exterior and a full-scale set for the interior completion of the move, but the extended perspective cube or tunnel would be the same in any case.

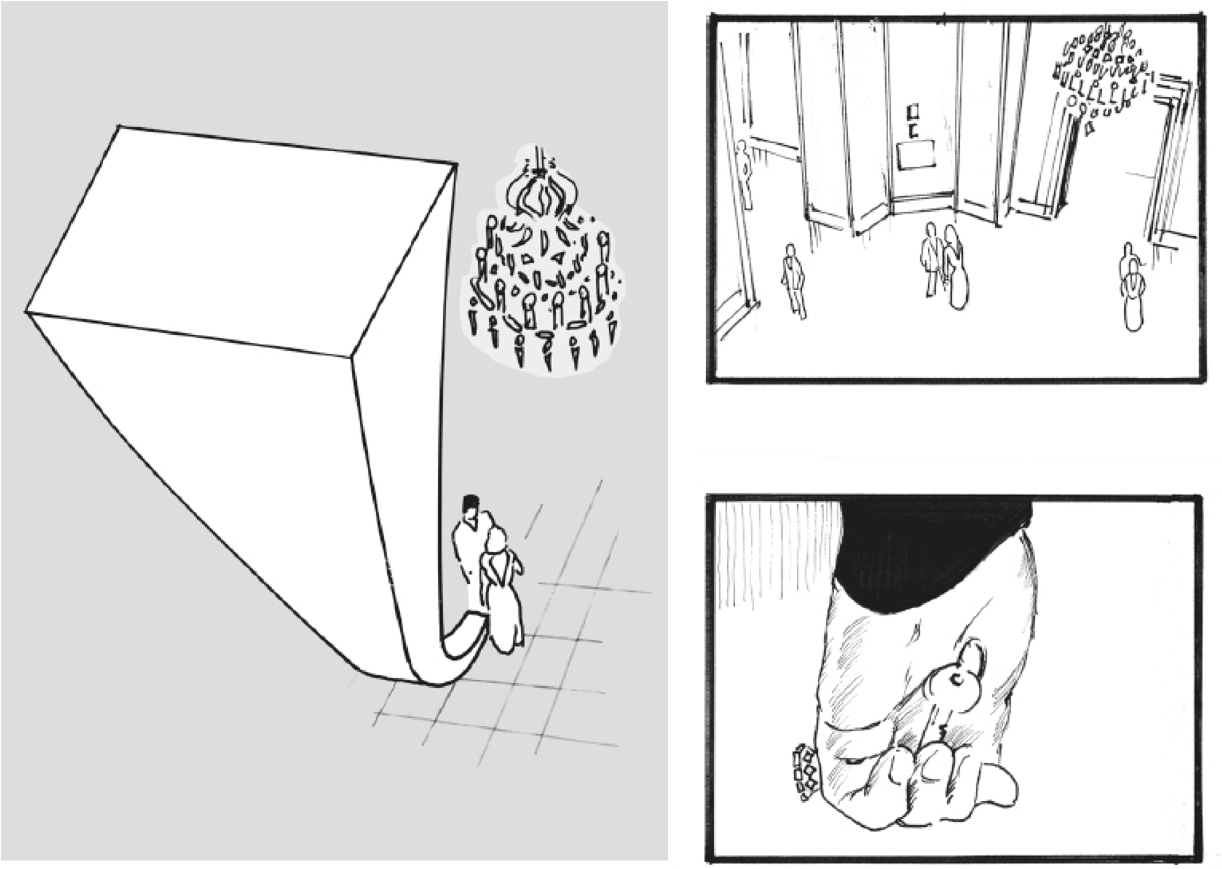
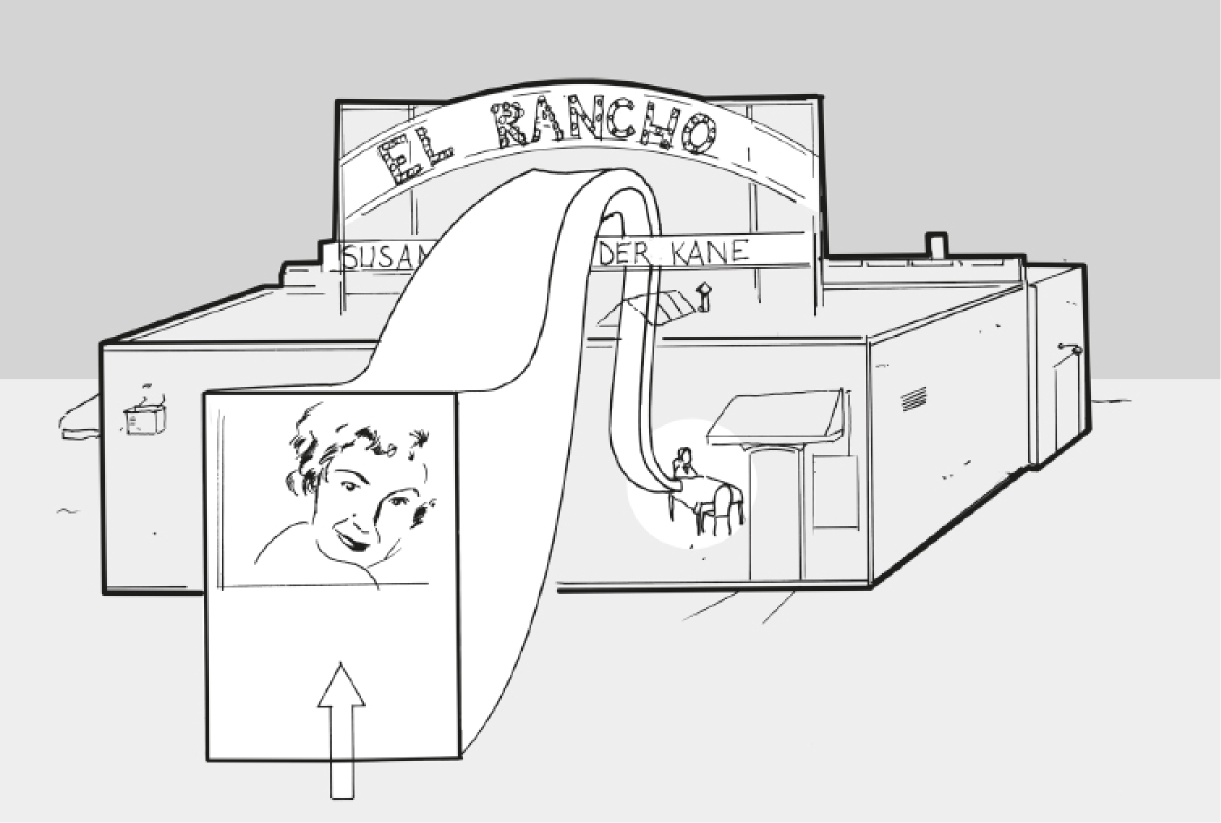
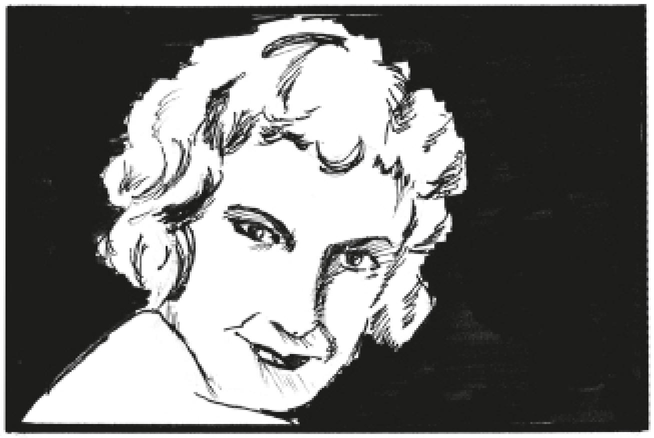
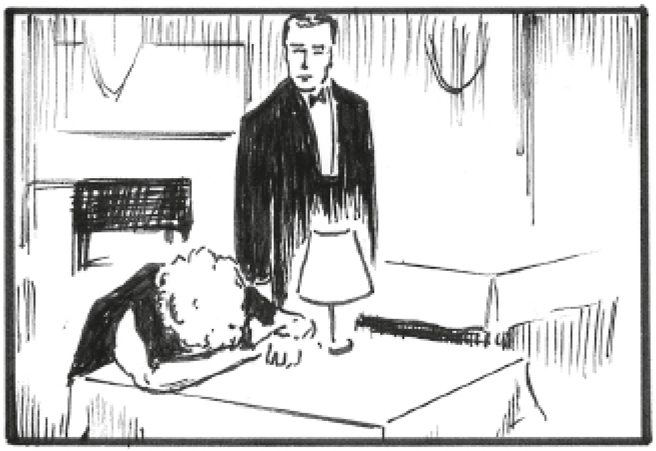


Figure 19.11: The long crane shot from *Notorious*.


EL RANCHO
SUSAN
DER KANE

The crane shot that passes through the skylight in *Citizen Kane*.





DJI S1000 Drone
Image courtesy of DJI Technology, Inc.

20 Tracking Shot Choreography

Now that the basic types of moving camera shots have been described, we can look at how actors' staged in depth and multiple centers of interest can be combined using the traveling camera. The variations possible with a simple track setup can range from a stylish move alongside two players in conversation to the multi-character sequence shot that connects several story elements and locations.

Moving Camera and Mobile Staging

There are two staging options available with the moving camera: First, you can move the camera around a fixed subject, as demonstrated in the previous chapter, or second, you can move the subject and the camera simultaneously.

In the same way that there are basic staging patterns for dialogue in static shots, there are also basic camera moves for staged action. These moves are governed by two practical considerations: 1) the camera's range of motion when moving on dolly track or other equipment and 2) the fact that it is easier to move the actors than to move the camera.

The basic camera moves outlined in this chapter represent a flexible system that will give you an understanding of how the choreography of camera and actors can be integrated. The ultimate goal of this system is to encourage and facilitate a varied use of space, camera angle, and composition, thereby stretching the limits of the frame.

There are two parts to our staging system for the traveling camera:

- Tracking Choreography: This refers to the path followed by a moving subject relative to the path of the moving camera.
- Patterns and Positions: This is the same staging system for actors we used for static shots in Chapters 9, 10, and 11.

The basic idea in our staging system for the moving camera is that *any number of individual shots can be connected to form a single, uninterrupted shot*. This approach analyzes a moving shot as represented in a storyboard.

Each frame in a storyboard represents a static staging pattern that can be connected to other frames to form a single shot using the moving camera and mobile staging.

We can begin by looking at the simplest use of a straight-track dolly move.

Tracking Choreography One

In figure 20.1, we see three separate versions of the basic tracking shot presented side by side. Below each dolly is the frame as the camera views the subject. In each of the three camera moves, the subject-to-camera distance remains the same and represents a basic unit or building block. This type of staging is used all the time in dialogue sequences, though almost always as a medium shot or full shot. In its simplest form the shot opens with the camera and subject in motion and ends without any change in the subject-to-camera distance. In this sense, the subject is seen very much as he would be in a static shot with only a small amount of background movement visible.

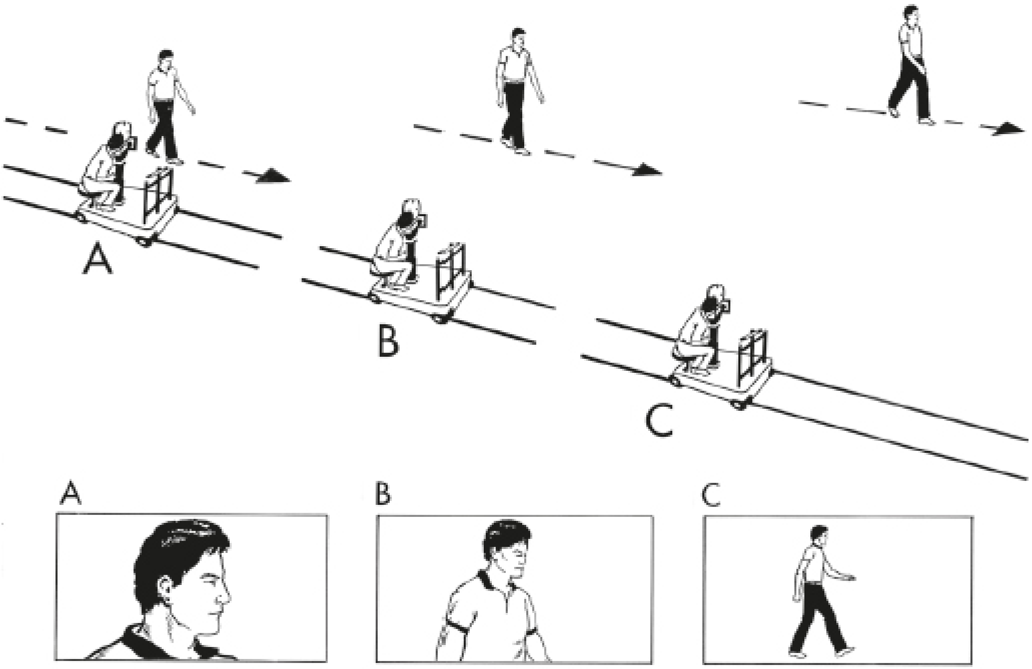


Figure 20.1

It's possible to cut between any of these moving shots to vary the shot size, but a more fluid way to change the framing is to have the subject move closer to or farther away from the camera during the course of the shot. This is usually done at the beginning or the end of the shot. In the aerial view of straight track shown in Figure 20.2, the gray areas at either end of the track represent the possible areas of approach or departure for any subject that moves parallel to the track. The filmmaker should consider the wide range of options the gray areas provide, since the approach can be used to include any area in the location that is of interest. Depending on the angle of approach or departure, the camera must pan to follow the subject. This becomes an opportunity to include a great deal of the action in the vicinity of the camera even before it begins to move.

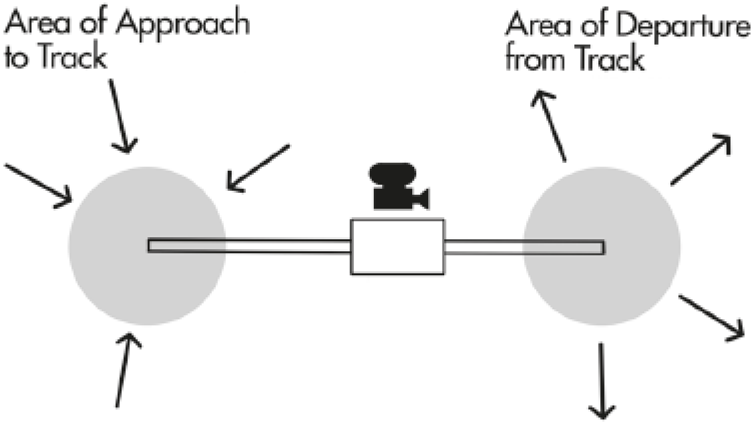


Figure 20.2

The long track between the circles could be used to record the subject in any of the framings shown in figure 20.1, only the subject would approach the camera from a distance in the beginning of the shot and exit into the distance towards the end of the shot.

With this type of staging, the camera may be motionless at the beginning of the shot while the subject approaches and then slowly begin to move as the desired framing is obtained. This framing is held for most of the shot. As the tracking move nears completion, the procedure is reversed and the camera slows down, possibly to a complete stop, as the subject moves away from the camera through the departure area. The approach may start very far away from the camera so that the subject is first seen in a roomy full shot and may depart framed in the same way.

Tracking Choreography Two

Figure 20.3 is a variation in which the area of approach is not merely an introduction, but part of the main dramatic action of the shot. In this case, the approach is directly towards the camera. If this were a dialogue scene, the subjects would be speaking during their approach to the track before the camera began to move. It has become a familiar convention to allow the audience to hear the subjects' conversation clearly even when they are very far from the camera.

As you can see, this choreography combines two storyboard building blocks — a full front shot and a profile medium shot. The illustration shows the subjects walking side by side throughout the tracking move, but of course the director is free to place the actors in any of the staging patterns and positions outlined in Chapter 9.

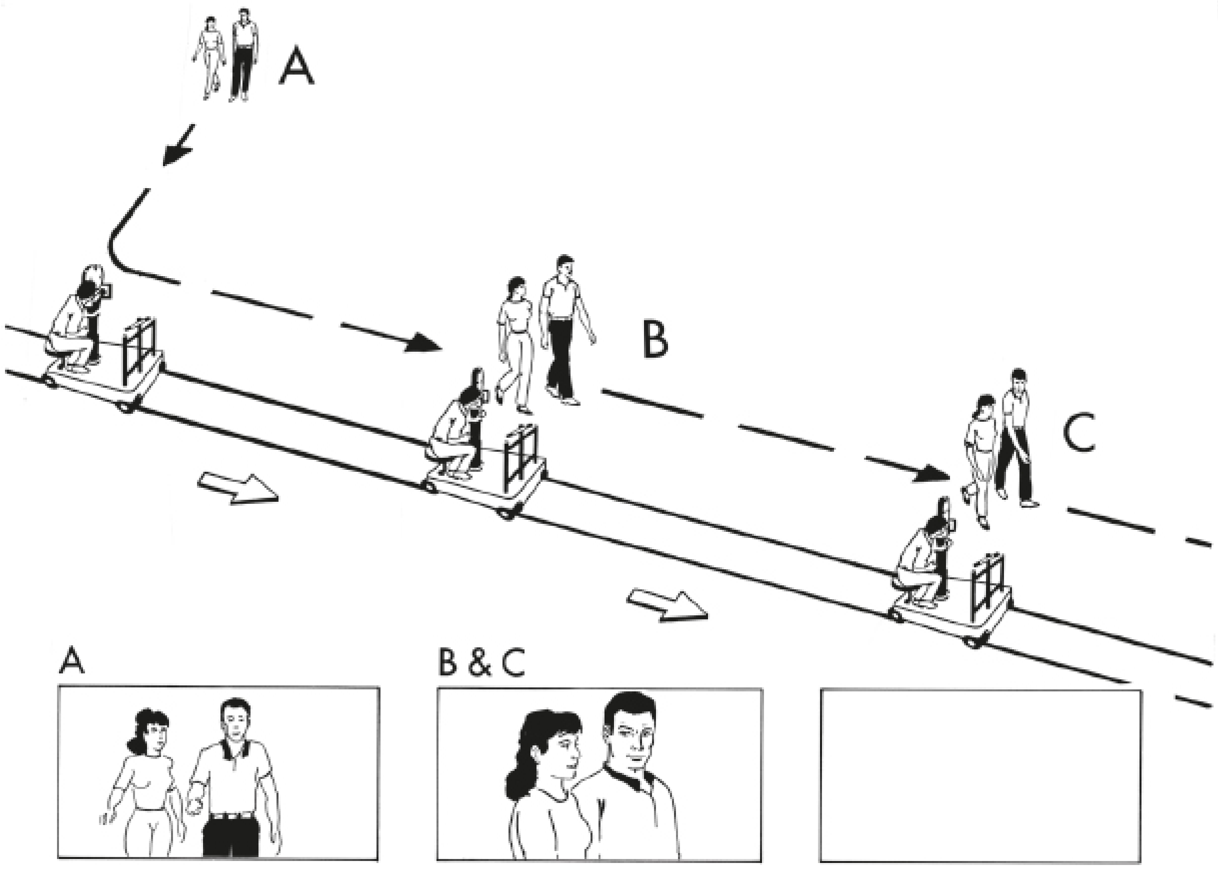


Figure 20.3

Tracking Choreography Three

Figure 20.4 demonstrates how three shots can be combined: a full figure profile, a full front shot, and a medium profile shot. To combine these views the camera moves at the beginning of the shot at the same pace as the subjects, coming to rest as the subjects turn to approach the camera. When the subjects turn a second time to walk parallel to the track, the camera begins to move again. Other variations might include staging the action so that it takes place at different heights. For example, the track might be laid on a dock alongside a cruise ship. The first portion of the camera move would follow a subject onboard the ship as he walks along the railing 20 feet above the camera, which is moving parallel to the track. As shown in Figure 20.5, the player could then approach the camera when exiting the boarding ramp and complete the third leg of the tracking shot on the dock walking alongside the camera.

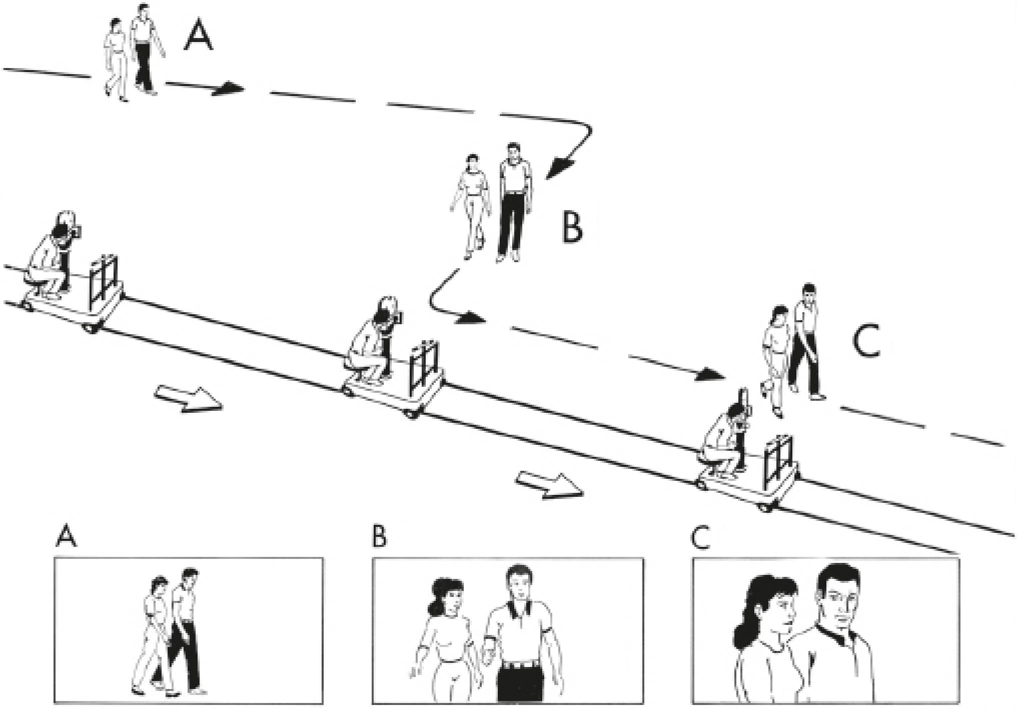


Figure 20.4

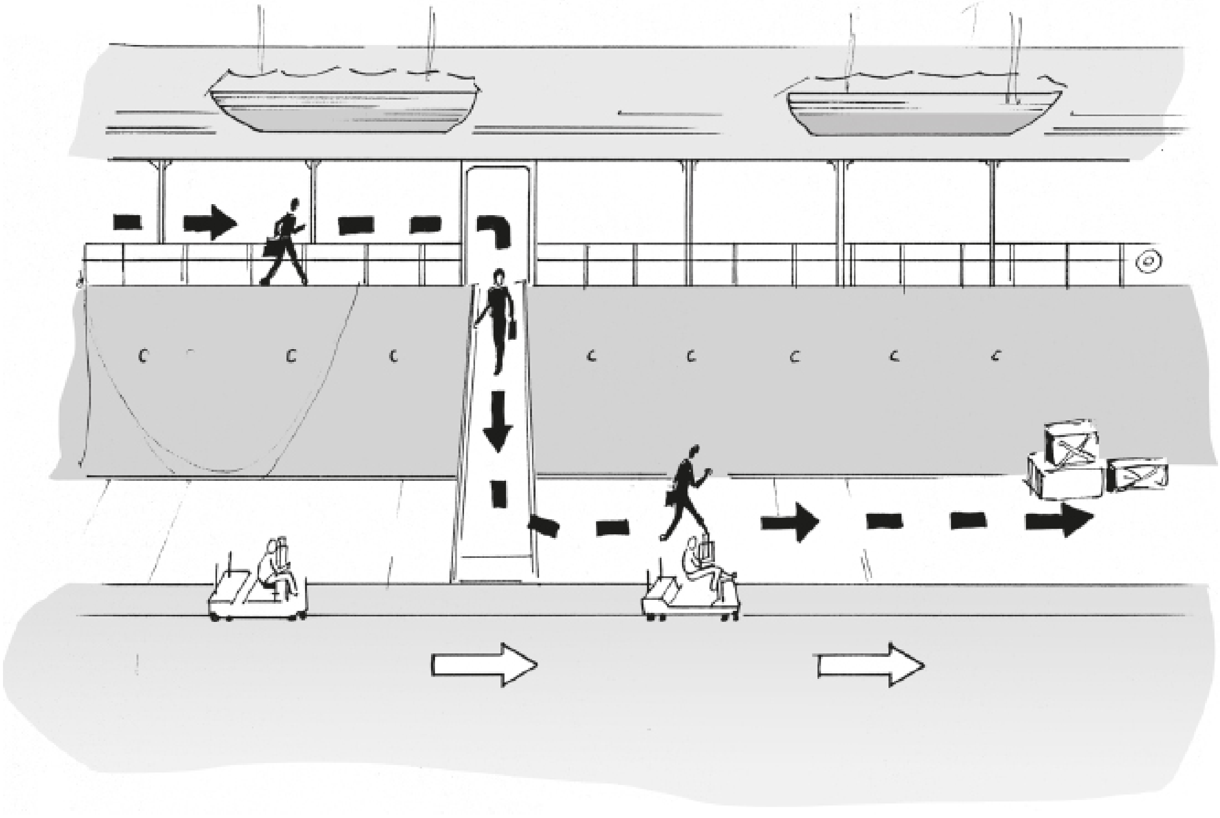
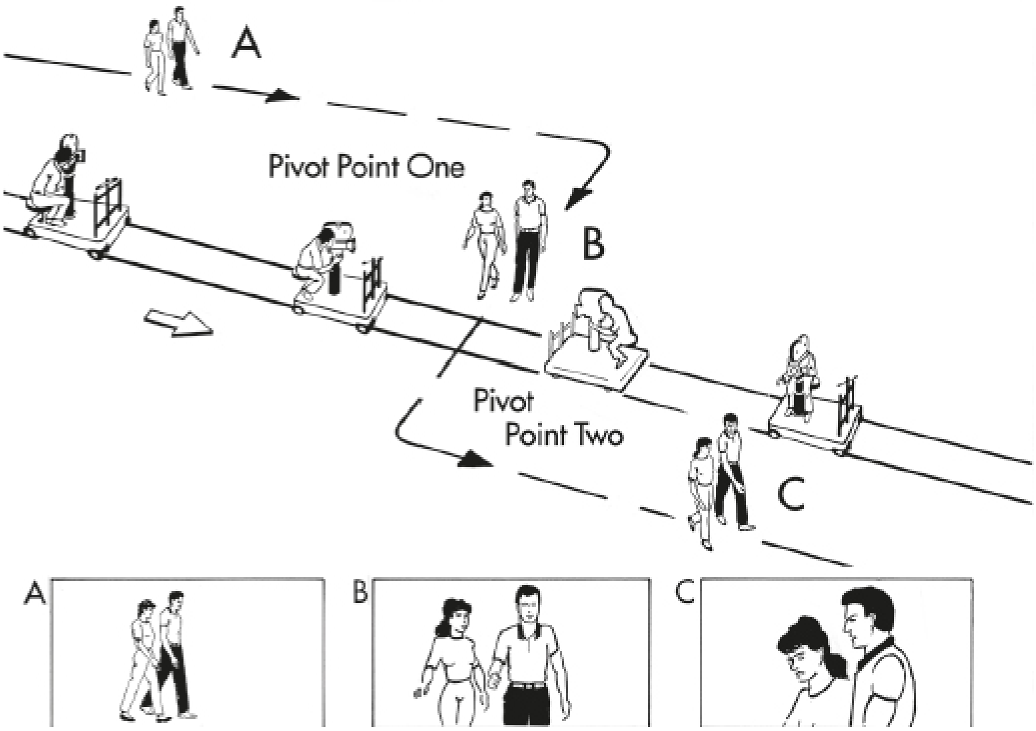


Figure 20.5: The tracking move covers a subject ar different heights.

Tracking Choreography Four

Figure 20.6 is almost the same as the previous S bend setup, with one important difference: The players cross the track. Again, a long or full shot is combined with a full front shot and a medium shot, but with a change in direction as shown in frame C of the storyboard. If this change in direction looks disconcerting, it is perfectly understandable in the actual shot, since the change of direction is gradual. The pivot point for the camera can be on either side of the players' path when they cross the track. Refinements of this type are determined by the location and the specific needs of the scene.

Figure 20.6



Crossing the track will work for any tracking layout in this section. Moving the action around the camera and forcing it to include 180 degrees of space places the camera in the center of the circle of action.

Tracking Choreography Five

Figure 20.7 reverses the framing of the two previous S bend patterns so that the players begin close to the camera and then move away. As with the other S bend moves, three framings are combined.

Applying this or any of the other choreographed moves to a real staging problem is of course dependent on the location, but the basic principles will work for any subject, whether it's two people in conversation, a car, or a speedboat.

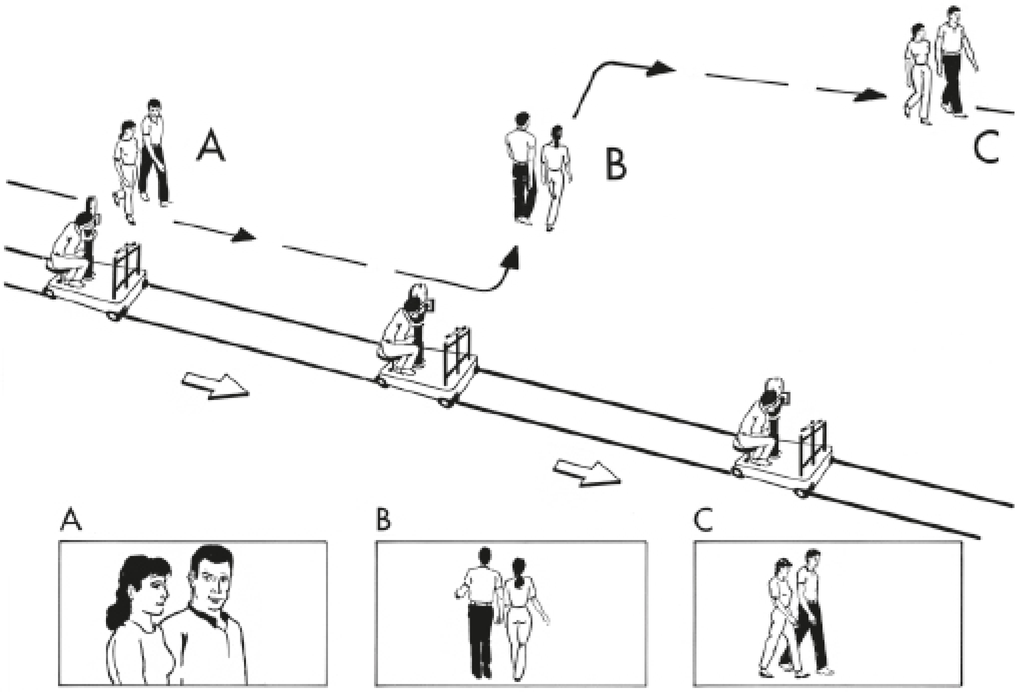


Figure 20.7

Even the track is dispensable, used here as a convenient way of indicating the path of the camera. The camera could just as easily be mounted on a crane, remote-control boom, camera car, or Steadicam rig, each adding its particular personality and range of motion to the process of designing the shot.

Tracking Choreography Six (Revealing Space)

Figure 20.8 begins with the subject in close-up. The subject moves angularly away as more of the background is revealed. In this case, the tracking move can be seen as combining two shots frequently paired together: the close-up shot of a subject and a cut on his look. For example, Figure 20.7 might show the subject approaching the camera for a close-up at the beginning of a scene. We hold on his look and his reaction to surroundings that are not included in the frame. This forces us to experience the location through the experience of the subject. As he moves away from the camera the background is revealed slowly, and we learn that the man is moving through the smoking ruins of a factory that has burned down. As the shot continues to widen, we see the victims of the fire being helped by police and emergency medical technicians.

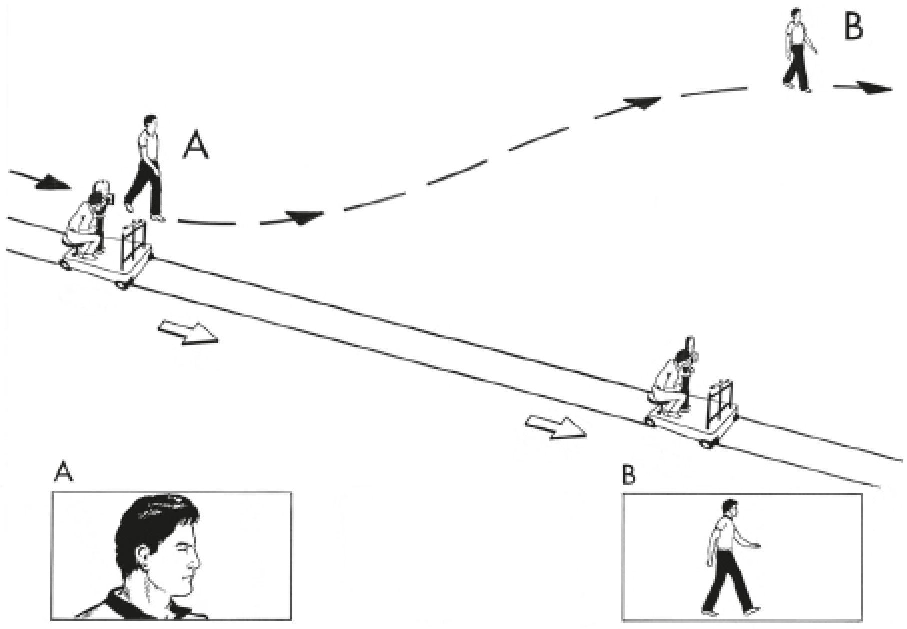


Figure 20.8

Tracking Choreography Seven

Figure 20.9 illustrates a reverse of the strategy shown in Tracking Choreography Six. This time we begin with a wide shot showing us what the location looks like. Instead of being introduced to the scene by studying the reaction of a particular player to his surroundings, we evaluate the location first and the player approaching us second. If this staging were used in the factory scenario from Tracking Choreography Six, we would form our own opinion of the locale and the action. When the player is finally seen in CU at the end of the shot, we are interested in finding out if he will react to the damage as we have. This is another instance of spatial control used to determine a question-and-answer strategy. Tracking Choreography Six and Seven are shots that encourage comparisons between the subject and the location.

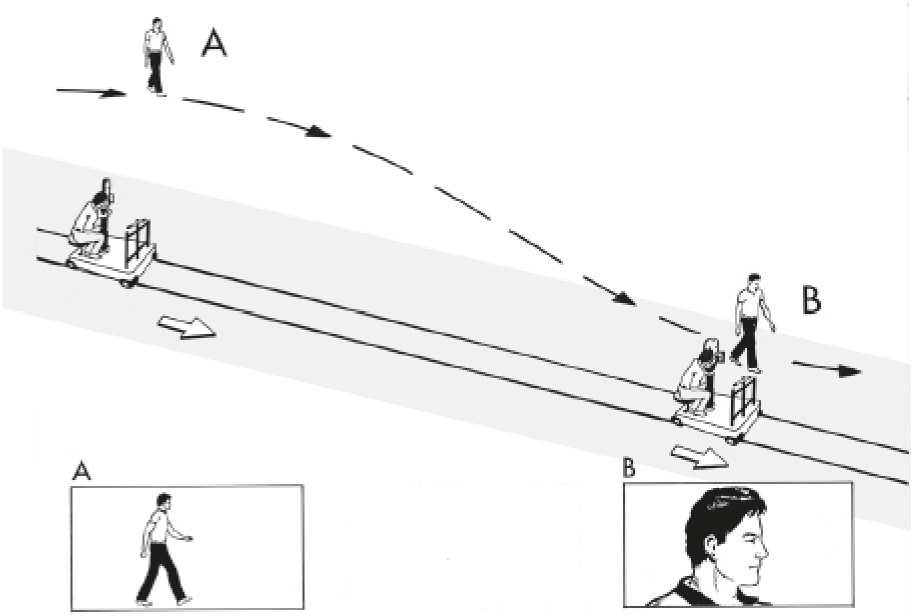


Figure 20.9

Extended Choreography

Now that we have looked at several possibilities for camera and subject choreography, we can make more complex arrangements by combining the seven tracking patterns. For instance, we can string patterns Three, Seven, and Five together for a tracking shot in the park location (Figure 20.10). Furthermore, all of the shots we have looked at can be joined together and combined with additional camera movement. Figure 20.10 shows a simple track setup, but a crane could easily be substituted to add vertical motion.

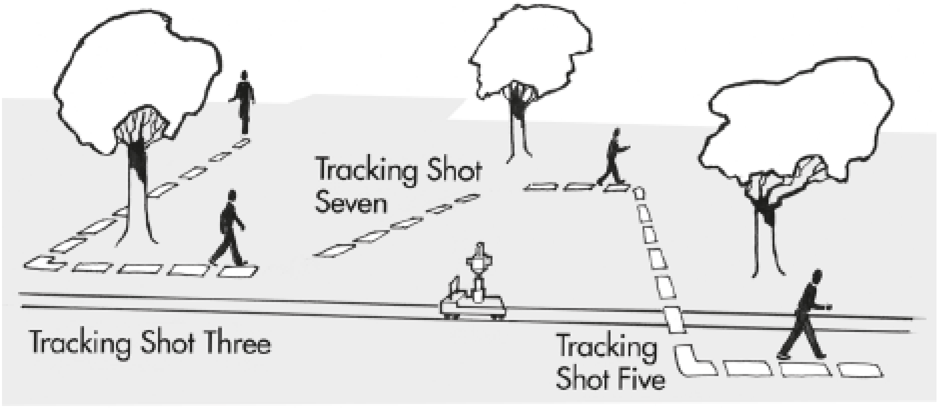


Figure 20.10: Three tracking patterns are combined to create a complex choreography.

Controlling the Camera Path Instead of the Subject Path

So far, we have only considered tracking shots where the subject was choreographed around straight track. However, there are many times when this is not possible — for example, when the action must follow a road, a path in the woods, or any other fixed route, or when the terrain restricts the movement of the subjects. In this case, the graphic variation within the shot — namely, shot size and camera angle — is determined entirely by camera placement and the choice of lens. In the next three examples we will return to the extended choreography we looked at in Figure 20.10, only this time the camera paths have been chosen to illustrate the value of retracking and countering.

In Figure 20.11, the camera tracks angularly through the scene in the opposite direction of the subject. This is a countermove that begins with the subject facing the camera until it passes the center of the shot, at which point the subject is facing away from the camera. As with any move in which the subject crosses the camera path, there is a reverse of screen direction. Because the change is gradual, crossing the line is unobtrusive.

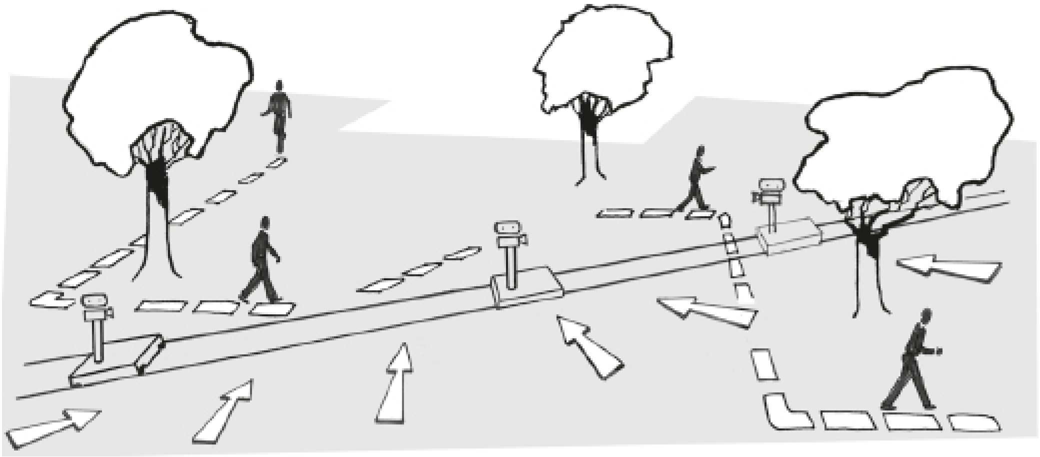


Figure 20.11: Extended countermove. In this setup, the camera and the subject move in opposite directions. The arrows indicate the panning action of the camera.

In Figure 20.12, the camera tracks towards the subject to the center of the shot and then reverses direction and moves back in the same general direction as the subject. The reversal of the camera is usually a distracting maneuver unless the camera comes to a stop before changing direction. This would be justified if the subject stopped for a moment to perform some action — for instance, taking off his jacket on a hot day. Here is how it might be set up: The camera and subject are approaching each other and meet at about one third of the distance illustrated. The subject and camera stop at this point and the subject takes off his jacket and wipes his brow with a handkerchief. After a moment, the subject continues on his way and the camera moves back along the path it just covered. The viewer will be unaware that the camera is retracking along familiar ground because the camera is pointed in a new direction.

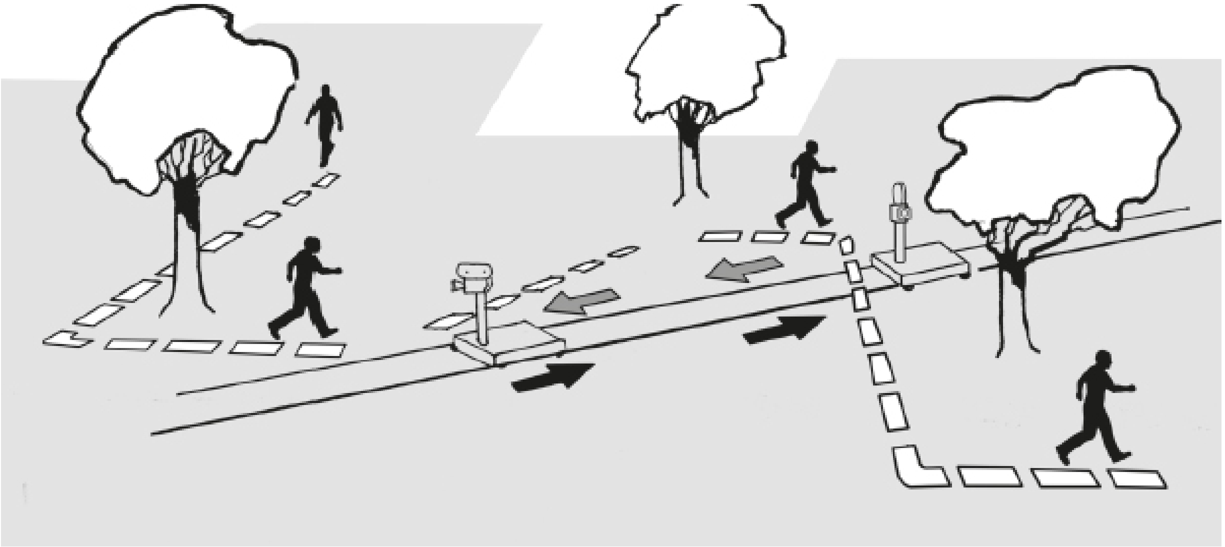


Figure 20.12: The camera approaches the subject (gray arrows) and then reverses direction, remaining ahead of the subject (black arrows).

In Figure 20.13, we see a side view of the pattern we've been studying. The camera path is parallel to and in the same direction as the path of the subject in three areas. When the subject approaches the camera directly, it pauses until the subject makes the turn to the next parallel course. This is a case where stopping the camera is necessary to keep the subject in frame.

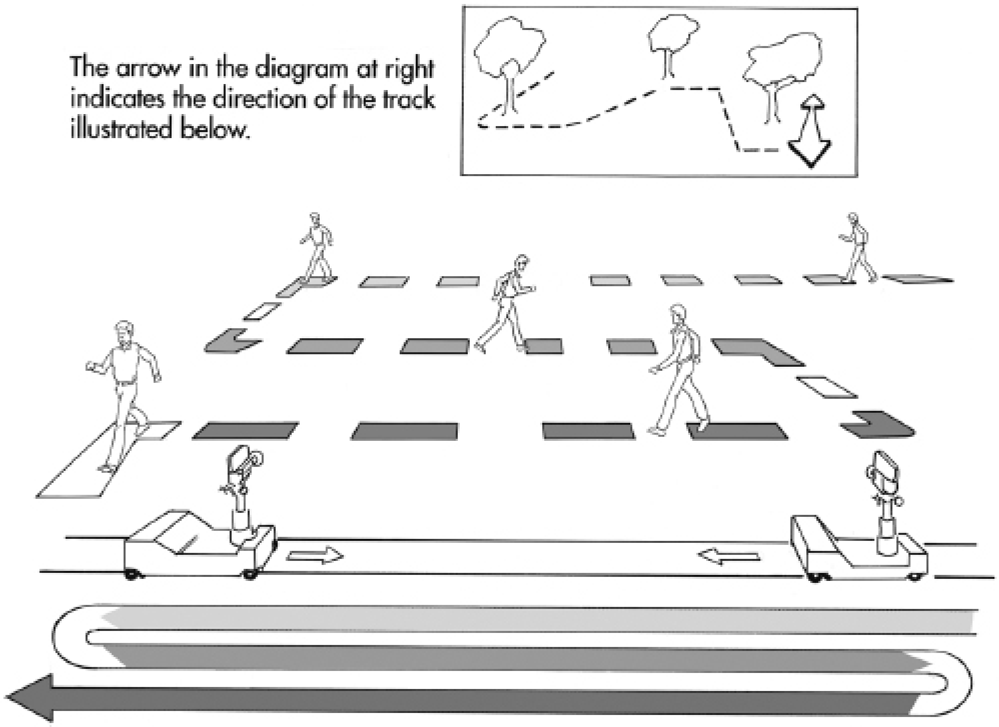

The arrow in the diagram at right indicates the direction of the track illustrated below.

Figure 20.13: The direction of the camera move is indicated by the solid diagrammatic line. The camera parallels the subject during the lateral movement, pausing when the subject approaches the camera.

Tracking Around an Obstacle

If there is one lesson to be learned about designing movement for the traveling camera it is that it's always better to work with, rather than against, the location. All too often directors rely on the sheer technical virtuosity (and forbearance) of their crews to move the camera over difficult territory. The Louma Crane, Skycam, Steadicam, and other camera supports intended to extend the camera's range of motion have their place, but resourceful staging is by far the most useful asset a director can call upon. In Figure 20.14, the camera is unable to follow the subject closely and include the background desired by the director because the swimming pool is in the way. A jib arm or remote-control crane might be able to put the camera above the water in the middle of the pool, but there is an equally good solution that is more easily executed. The action could be staged so that the camera frames the subject and pool area in wide shot, arriving in the middleground at the same time as the subject.

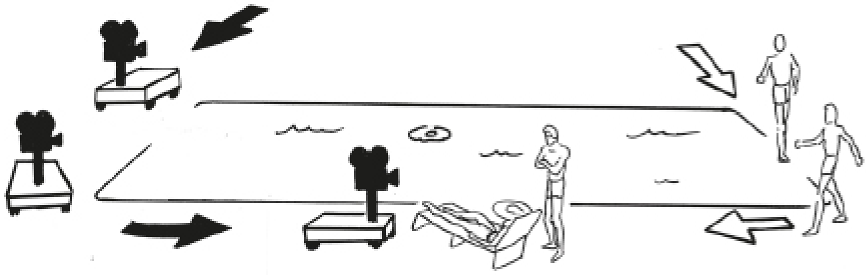


Figure 20.14

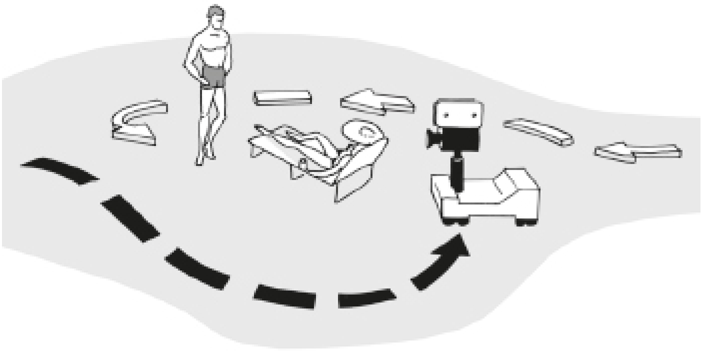


Figure 20.15

We could carry the idea further by continuing the movement of subject and camera in a countering move that circles the woman on the lounge chair, as shown in Figure 20.15.

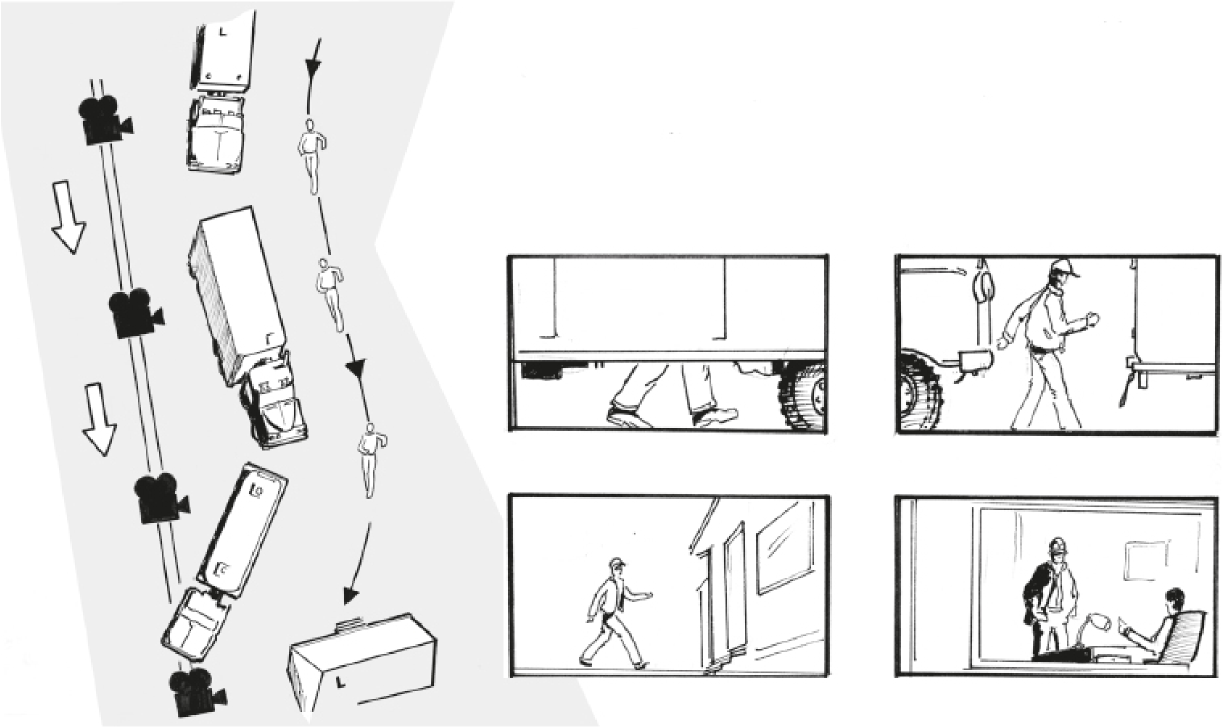


Figure 20.16: The camera tracks parallel to the driver as he walks to the office. As seen in the storyboard, the moving line of trucks is used as a framing device. When the driver enters the office, the camera frames him through the window in panel 4.

Permitting obstacles to remain between the subject and the camera can actually be of value since they may serve as framing devices. In the action illustrated in Figure 20.16, a truck driver walks along a line of slow-moving trucks. The original plan was to track parallel to the driver over a long distance as he approached an office. The trucks would drive by in the background and the driver would be in the foreground. To execute the shot in this way the trucks would have to drive on the shoulder of the road. But let’s say that this became impossible on the day of the shoot because heavy rain had rendered the shoulder of the road impassable. The director could devise an alternative shot in which the trucks are in the foreground and the driver is in the background, reversing the staging originally planned. In the new version the trucks obscure the man much of the time as they drive by. A second obstacle (the building) is introduced when the driver enters the office. The camera tracks to the window and zooms in slowly until the driver is framed through the glass speaking with his boss. Still, it is a perfectly acceptable and graphically interesting solution to permit an obstacle to block the primary subject.

Changing Subjects Within a Shot

The previous tracking examples dealt with a single subject. One value of the long tracking shot is its ability to link separate story elements together, moving from subject to subject within the shot. Figure 20.17 is an example of a basic strategy to move from one element to another. Actually, the technique is a cross pan performed as the camera is tracking. The shot begins by framing the car as it enters the shot (white dolly). It then follows the car on a parallel course. As the car begins to turn away, a boy on a bicycle arrives and the camera picks him up at the cross point, panning with him until the camera is pointed in a new direction. The camera changes direction (black dolly) and follows the boy on a parallel course until he exits the shot. If a new subject entered where the boy exited, the process could be reversed until the camera returned to the position and framing of the opening frames of the shot.

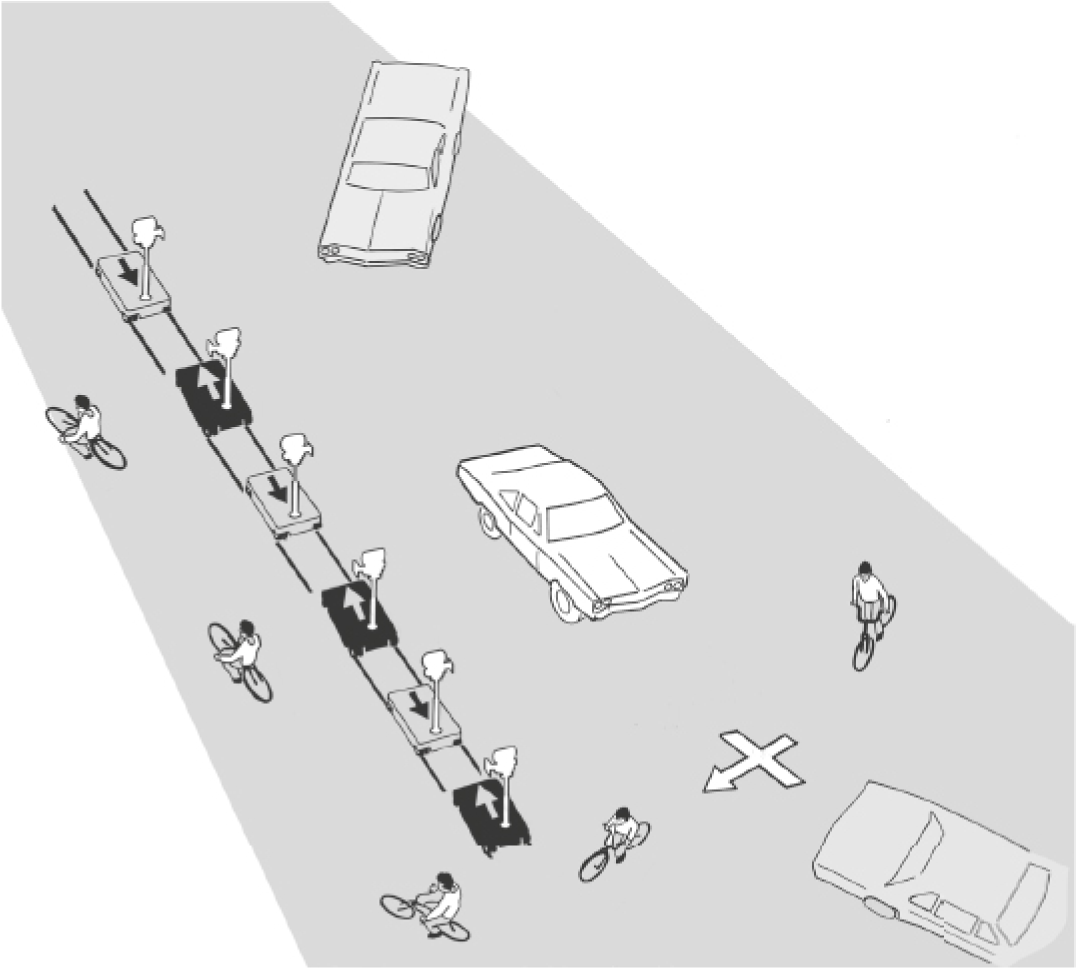


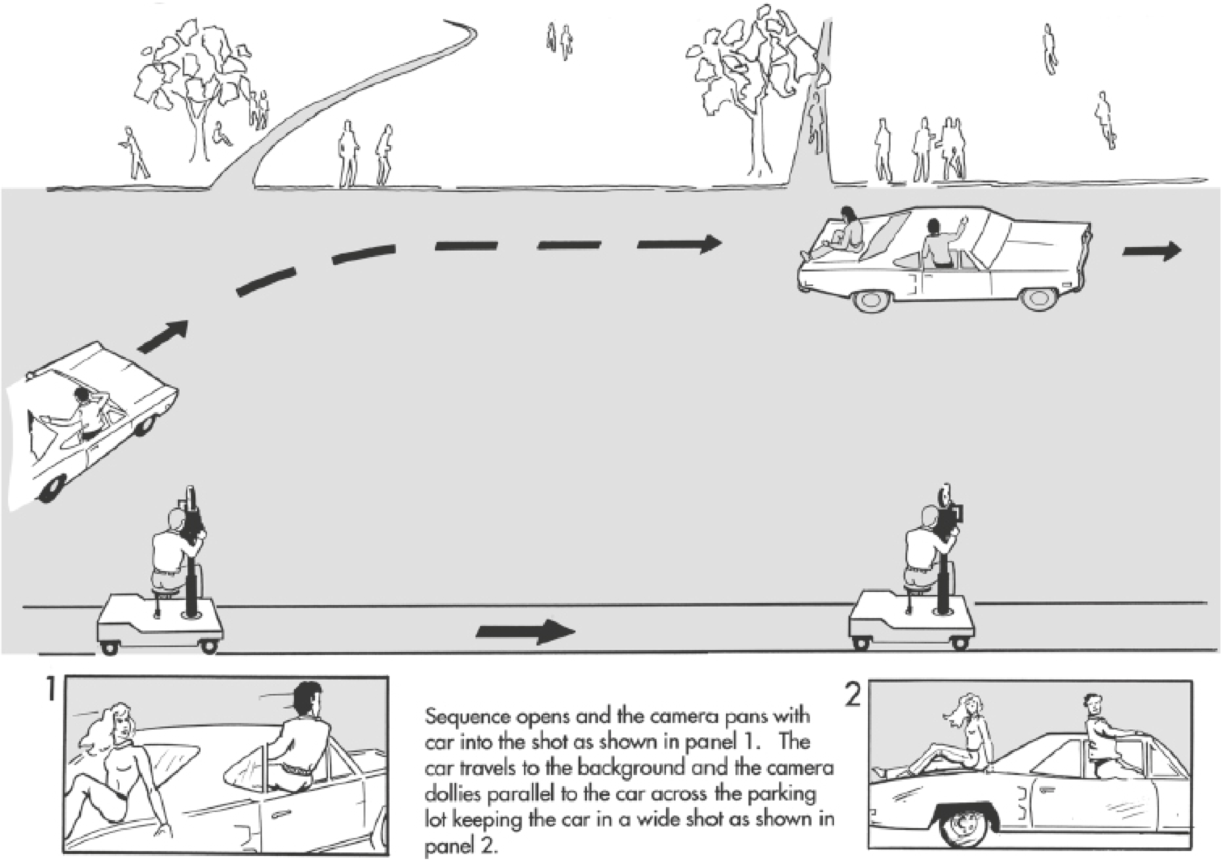
Figure 20.17

Tracking and Staging to Connect Multiple Story Elements

We can carry the previous idea even further by combining lateral tracking, cross pans, mobile blocking, and in-depth framing. The following five storyboard panels describe action that could easily be shot as individual frames.

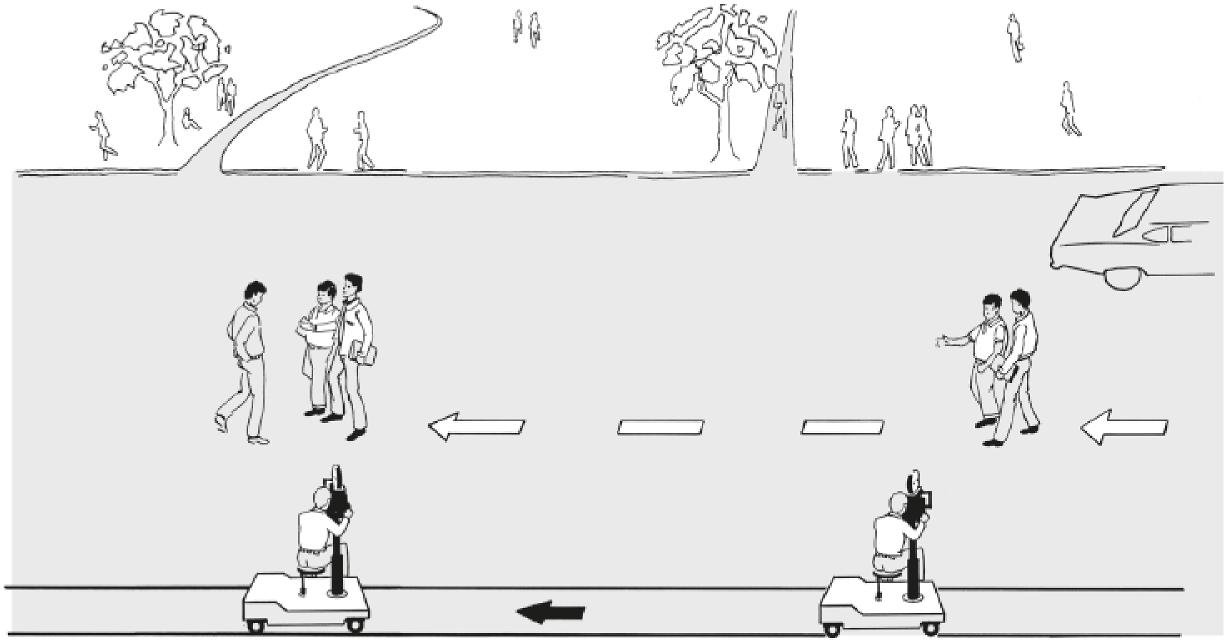
Diagrams A–C, beginning on this page, show how the individual events can be tied together into a single, uninterrupted shot. The separate elements are positioned in depth and move in opposing directions that intersect in front of the camera. The first element is a car that enters the shot in the *foreground* traveling to the background. The camera follows the car in a long tracking shot that moves left to right until the car exits the frame. The second element is three boys who enter the frame in the *middleground*. The camera changes direction, moving back over the space just covered and tracking with the boys as they carry on a conversation. The third element is a girl who enters the shot in the *background*. She moves past the boys toward the camera and the camera picks her up, following her to the *foreground*. At this point one of the boys runs over to speak to her.

Diagram A



Sequence opens and the camera pans with car into the shot as shown in panel 1. The car travels to the background and the camera dollies parallel to the car across the parking lot keeping the car in a wide shot as shown in panel 2.

Diagram B



The car exits the frame as two boys walk by in the middleground moving in the opposite direction (frame 3). Now the camera tracks along with the boy, keeping them in medium shot as they speak. They cross to the opposite side of the parking lot.

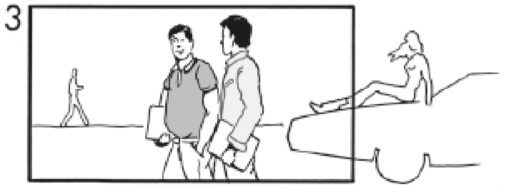
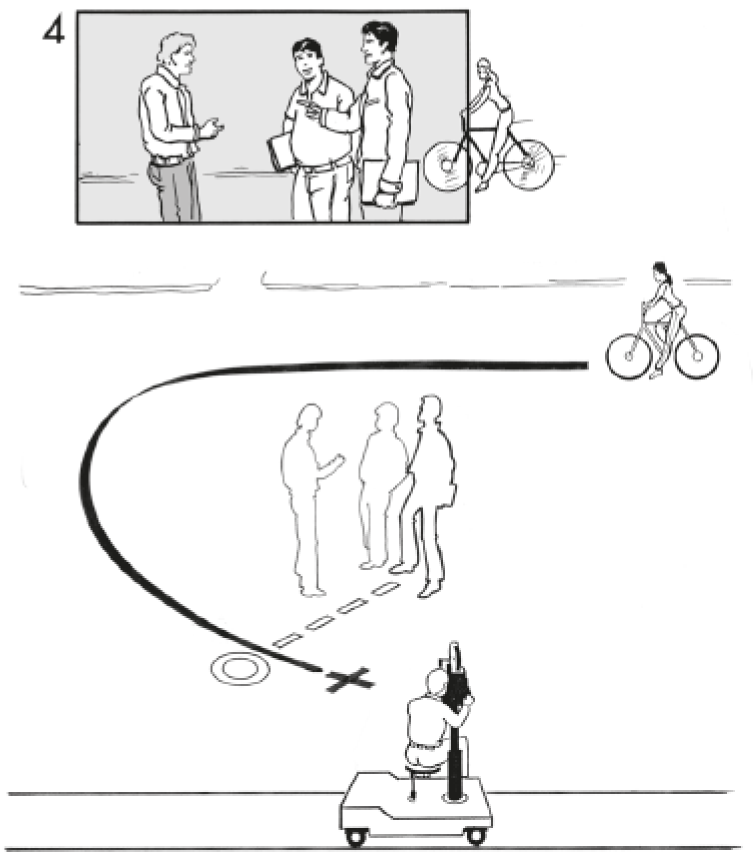
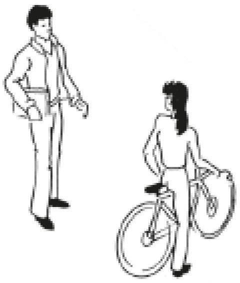


Diagram C



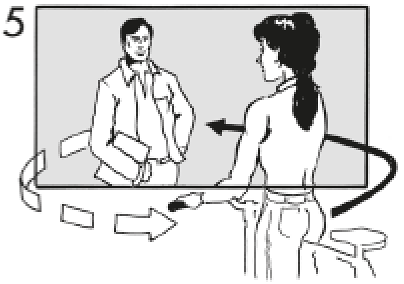
A third boy joins the other two and the camera stops with them as they speak. A girl on a bike enters the background and coasts to the foreground as shown in panel 4. Now the camera shifts attention to her. One of the boys runs up behind the girl and they speak for a moment (panel 5).

Diagram D

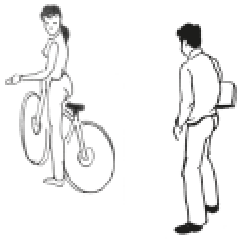


The girl begins to bike away. The boy moves towards camera; they switch places. She stops, calls to him.

5



The boy is right in front of the camera when he turns around in the OTS framing in panel 6. After saying goodbye she bikes away.



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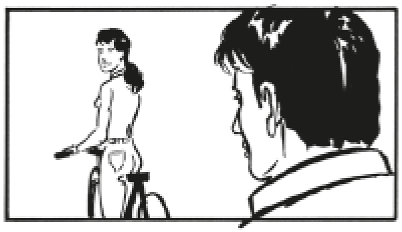
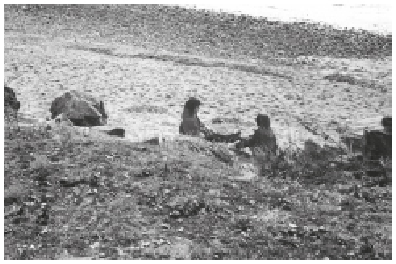


End of sequence.

Subjective and Modified Subjective Tracking Shots

So far, the tracking shots we've looked at frame the subject as seen by a neutral observer. A tracking shot can also be motivated subjectively as either a full POV shot or a modified subjective shot that includes the subject in the frame. For example, a man goes to the edge of a grassy ledge to find his wife and his sister, who are seated below on the bench. In the following examples, the separate frames represent a continuous tracking shot.

1



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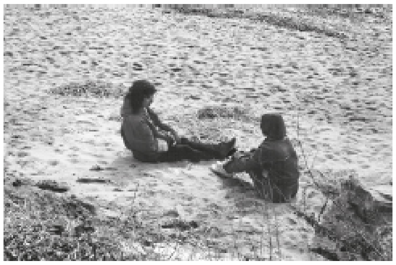

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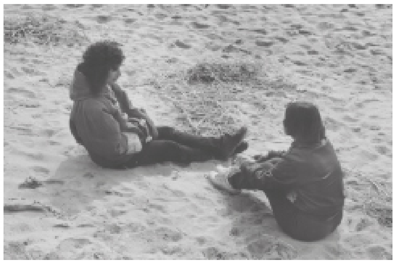
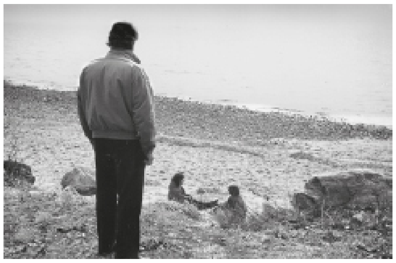


The first version depicts a full subjective tracking shot in which the camera moves towards the two women seated on the beach. The tracking shot would normally be set up in a previous shot of the man looking at the women as he walks towards them.

1



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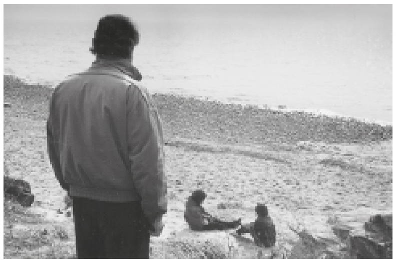

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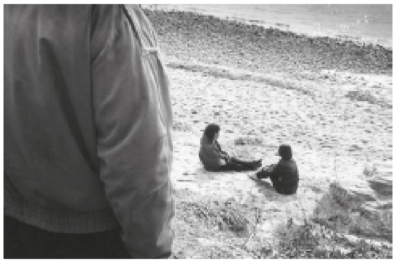
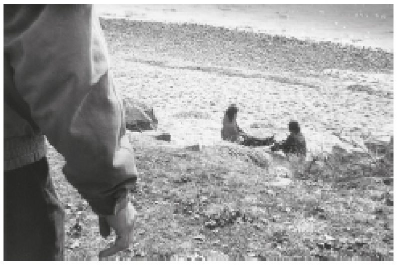


This next version is a variation on the subjective tracking shot in which the camera moves towards the subject and the man watching them. This is a situation where the man's "look" is implied. Even though we do not see his eyes, he is clearly watching the women. As the camera moves towards the man, it goes from an objective to a subjective mode. By the time the camera uses the man's arm as a framing device our close proximity to him encourages identification.

1



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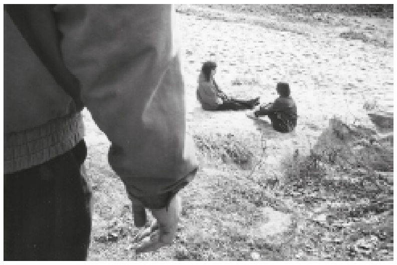

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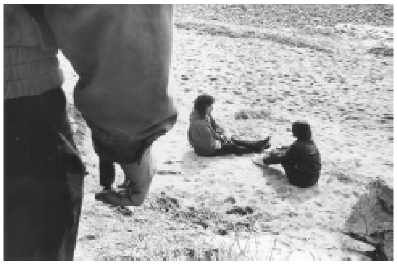

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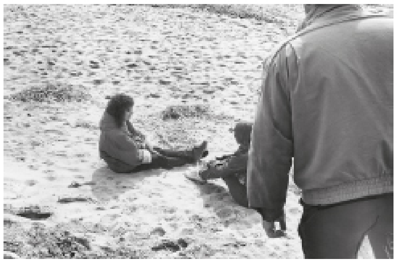

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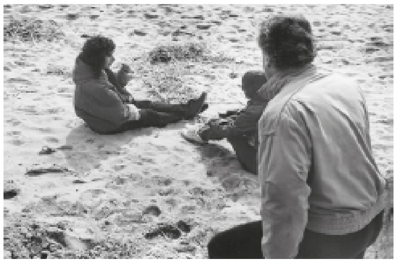

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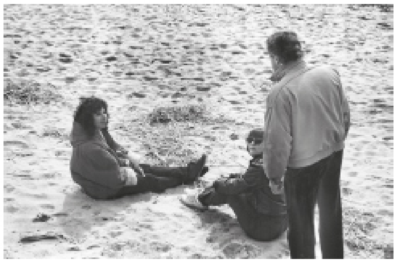


In this last version, we find an interesting situation in which the man enters his own subjective shot. The camera tracks alongside the man as he approaches the women on the beach. Again, the camera's closeness to the man elicits our identification with him. As the man continues past the edge of the beach the camera stops moving. Now the man climbs down the slope and joins the women and the shot returns to the objective mode.

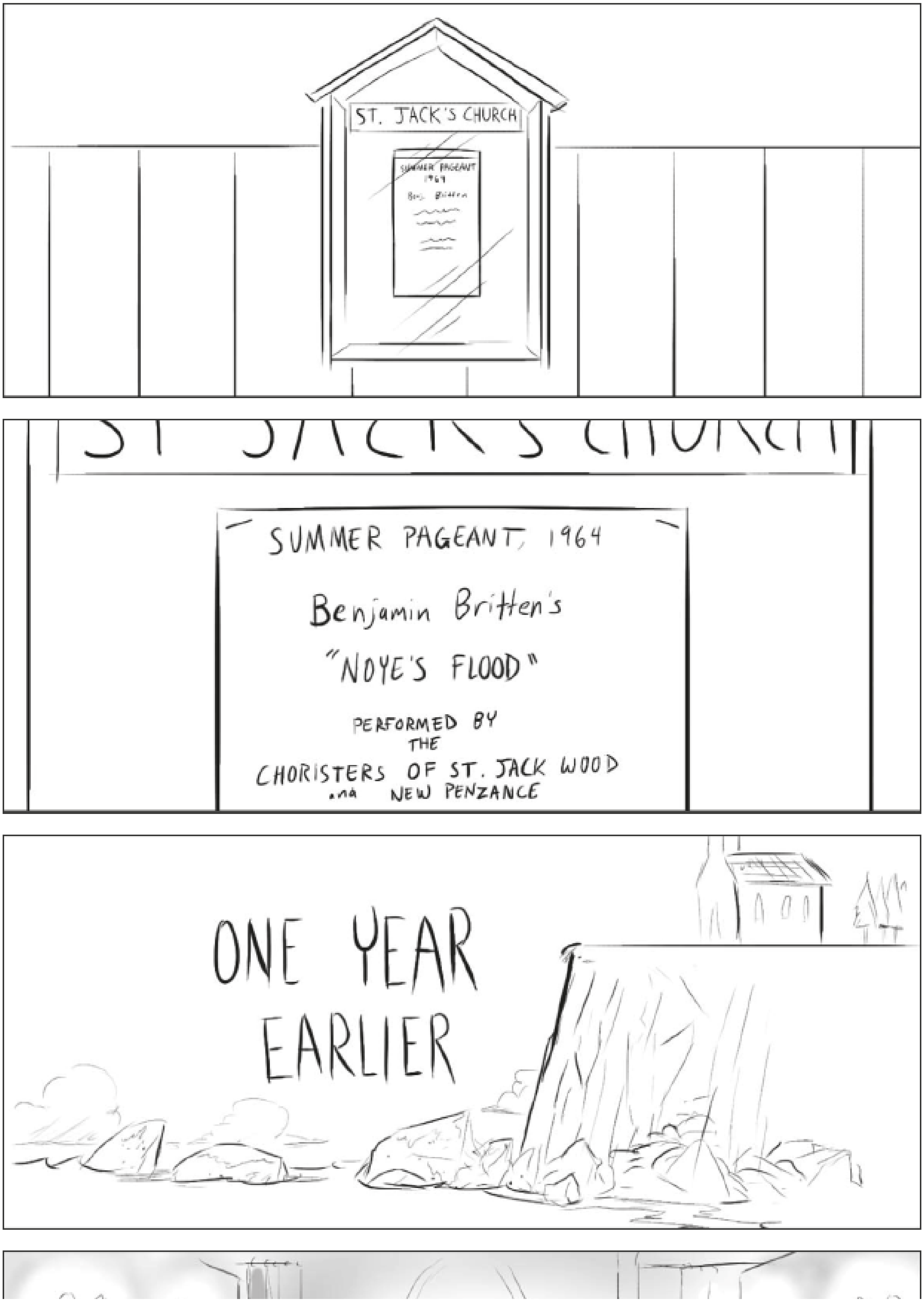
Breaking the Mold

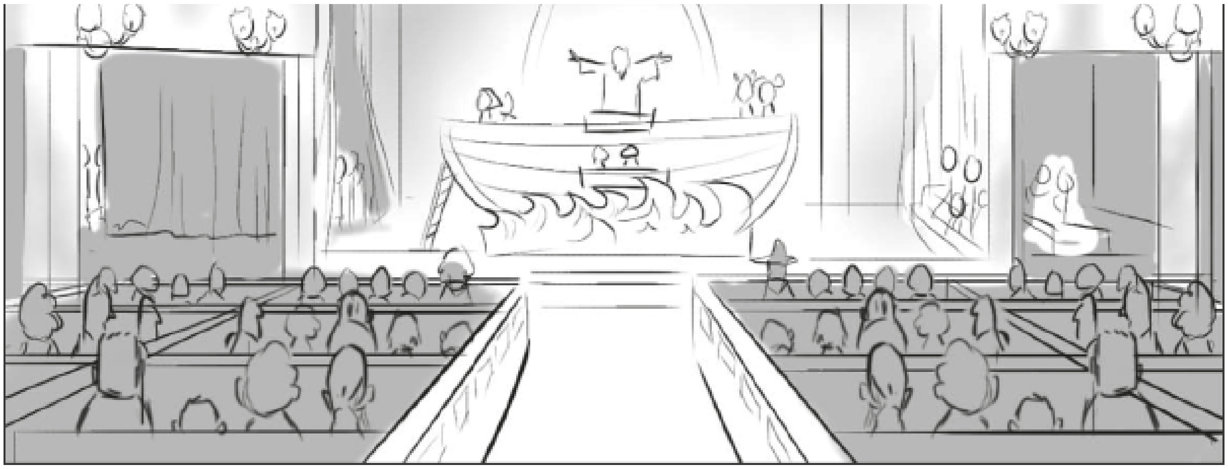
Pat Harpin's storyboard for Wes Anderson's *Moonrise Kingdom* shows the iconic scene when Sam meets Suzy. Anderson frequently departs from traditional Hollywood style by drawing attention to the shot flow with a visually deceptive simplicity that serves Anderson's deadpan whimsy. Anderson often uses a staging style that treats the film frame like a theatrical proscenium. He's been developing this approach over several films. This style eschews fast cutting and angular shots whether low or high angle for eye-level flattened staging. However, Anderson fluidly moves to more conventional framing and cutting when it suits him. The storyboard is 129 panels; however, we have split the board into two parts with a total of 54 panels.

The sequence on the following pages depicts a summer pageant in a church put on by the town on a small island. Sam, a ten-year old khaki-clad scout, is seated in one of the pews with several other scouts and the scout leader. Sam wanders outside (it's evening) past a woman stage manager and 30 or 40 children in costumes, mainly animals. Sam goes back inside, goes downstairs to the basement of the church. That's the end of Part One, but the scene continues to include the moment when Sam meets Suzy, with whom he will run away in one year, featured in Part Two.

Moonrise Kingdom Storyboards: Part 1

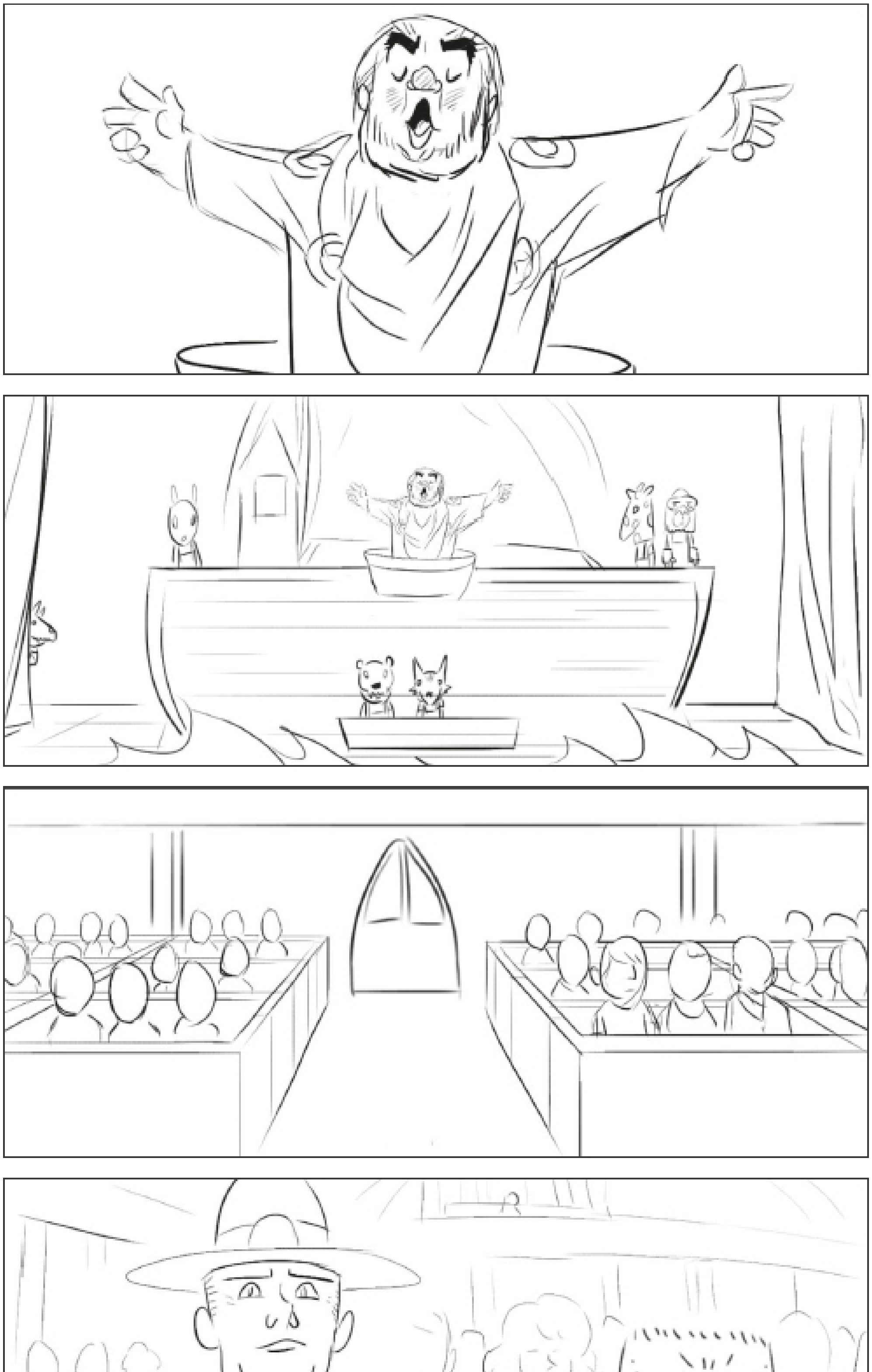
Begin with close-up on the poster announcing the pageant. We then see the church on the bluff and move to the interior of the church and the Noah's Ark Pageant (Noye's Fludde) set in Panel 4.


ST. JACK'S CHURCH
SUMMER PAGEANT 1964
Benj. Britten
SUMMER PAGEANT, 1964
Benjamin Britten's
"NOYE'S FLOOD"
PERFORMED BY THE
CHORISTERS OF ST. JACK WOOD
and NEW PENZANCE
ONE YEAR EARLIER



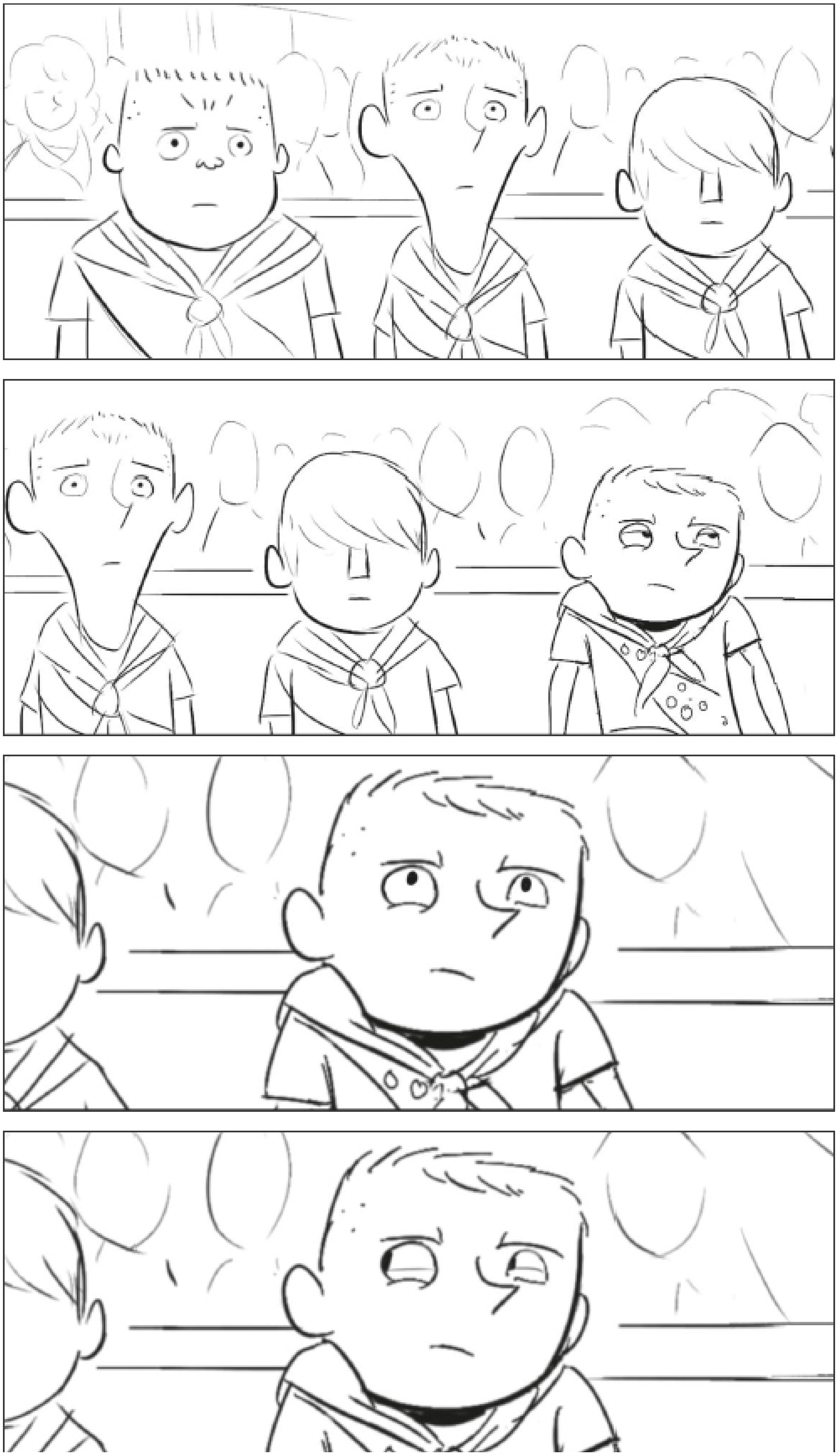
Storyboard for *Moonrise Kingdom* by Pat Harpin

Close on the singer in the church. We saw him in wider angle in the previous shot and now we pull back. In Panel 3 we reverse cut 180 degrees to frame the audience. All the of the shots in this and Page Three are shot flat to camera. In the last panel we frame the scout leader and begin a dolly move down the bench and the faces of the scout troop.



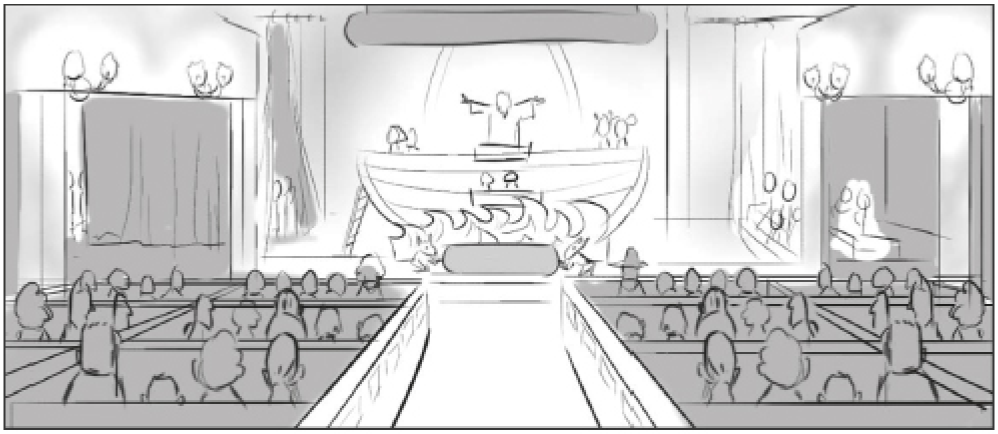
Storyboard for *Moonrise Kingdom* by Pat Harpin

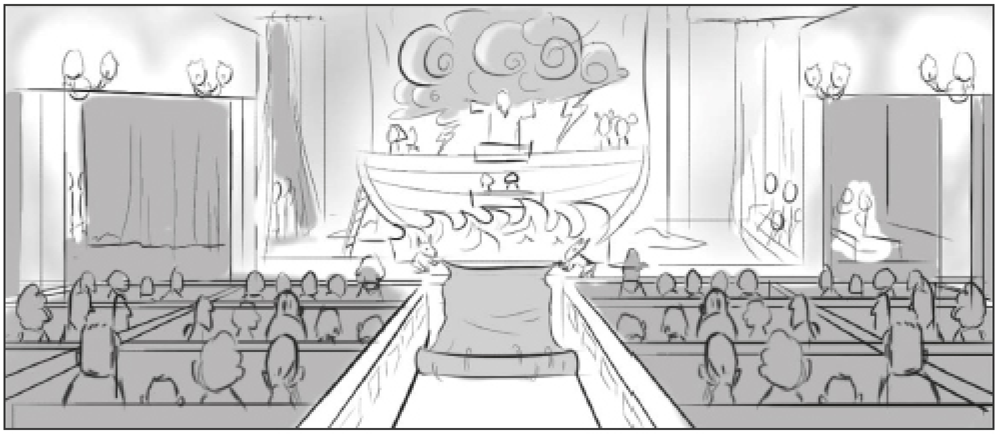
The lateral dolly move continues until we come to rest on Sam. These shots are themselves part of the comedy of the entire scene by allowing the technique of the shot to be apparent to the audience. We are being encouraged visually to view the scene.

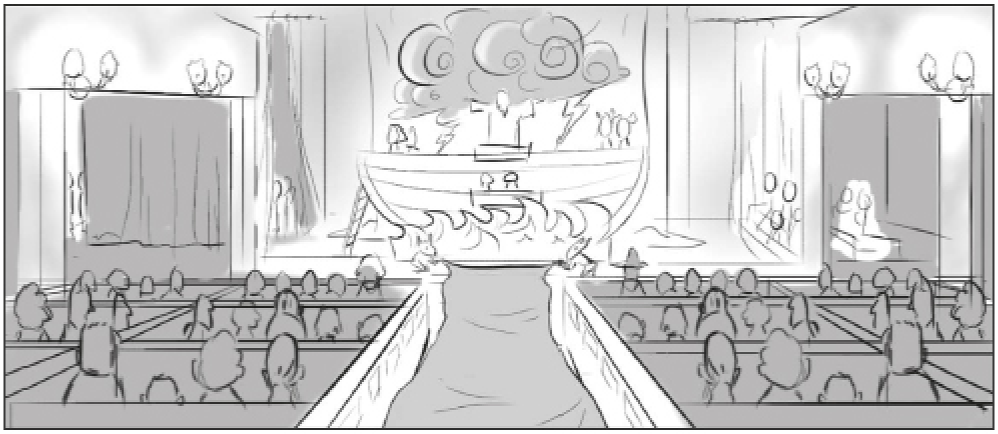


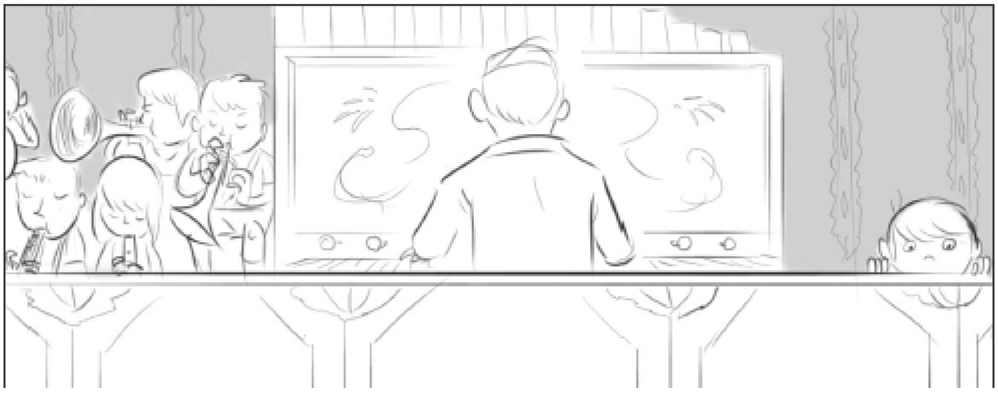
Storyboard for *Moonrise Kingdom* by Pat Harpin

This scene was omitted from the movie, but continues the overall scene plan filled with straight-on shots that tend to diminish rather than exploit perspective three-point perspective.



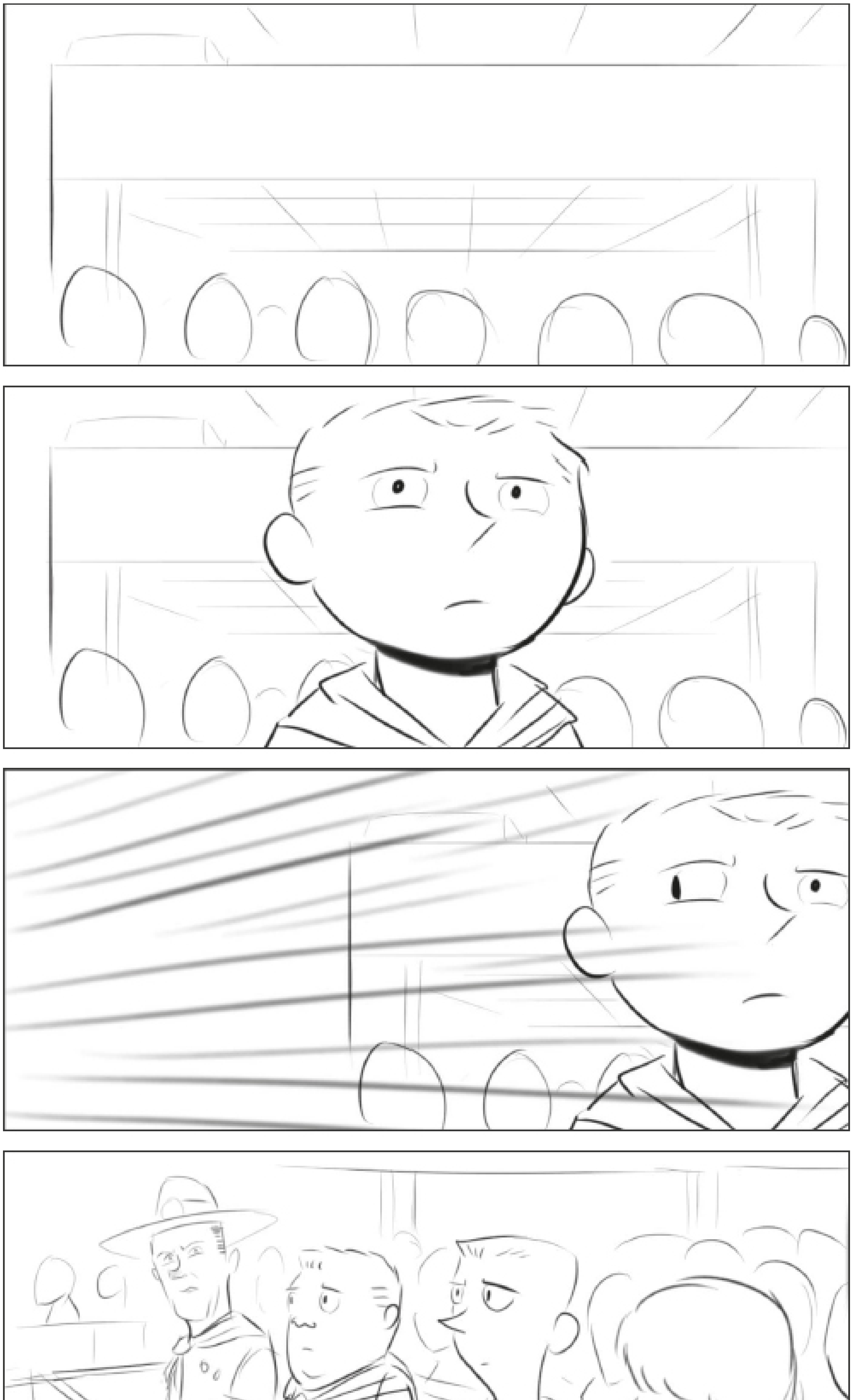






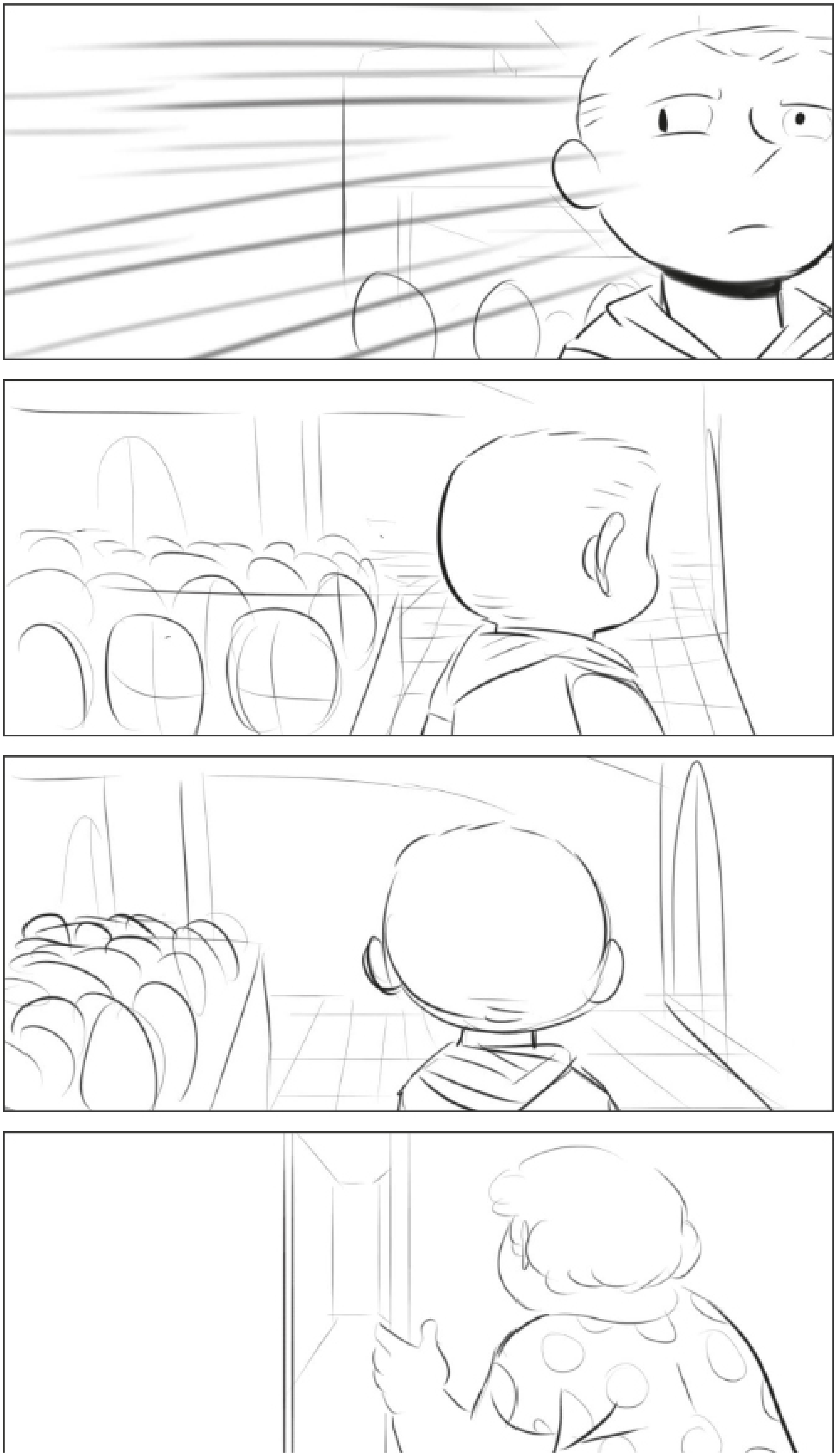
Storyboard for *Moonrise Kingdom* by Pat Harpin

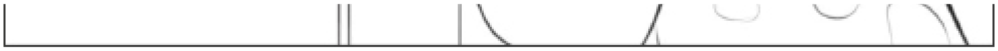
We return to Sam, who is showing his boredom watching the play.



Storyboard for *Moonrise Kingdom* by Pat Harpin

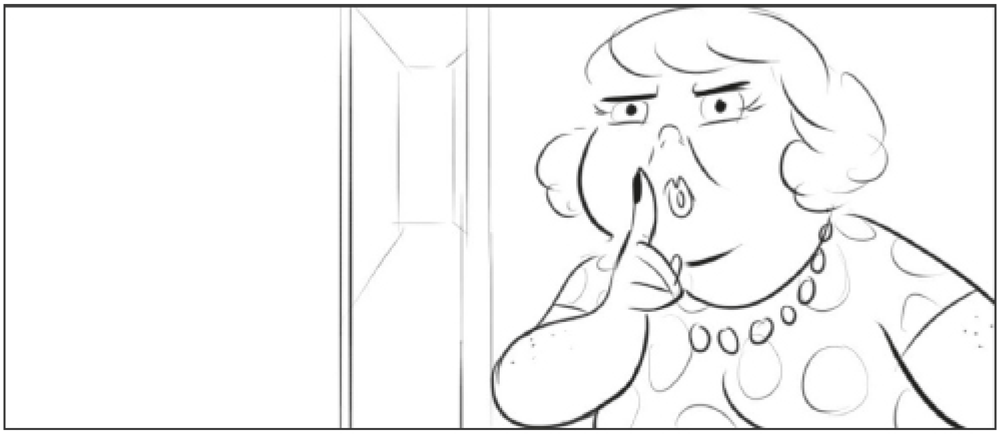
Sam stands and we follow him down a side aisle as he exits the theater and goes outside, where he is cautioned to be quiet by a woman/stage manager.

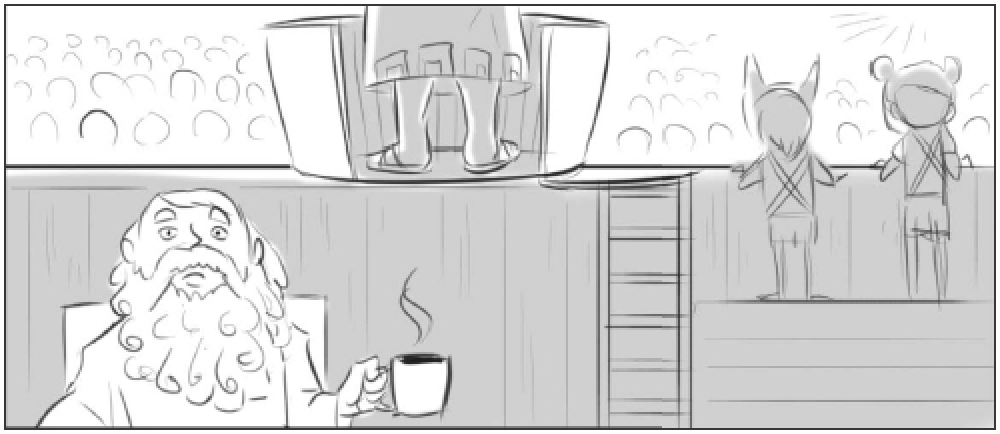


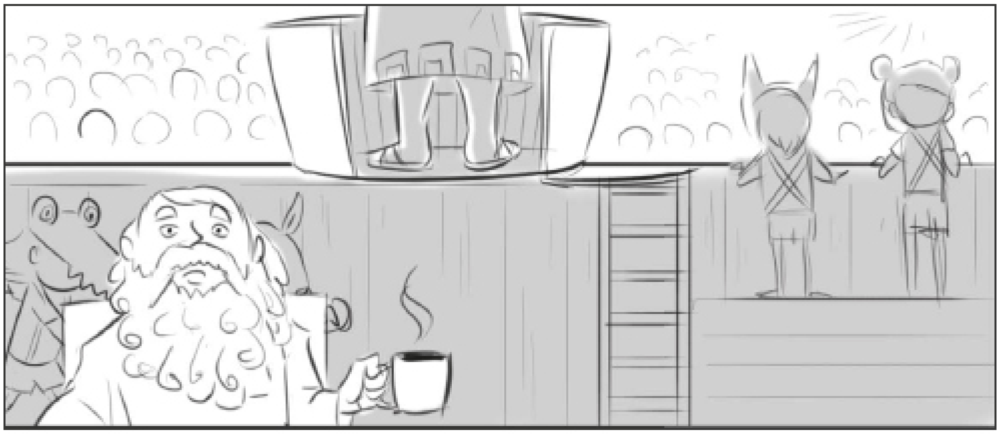


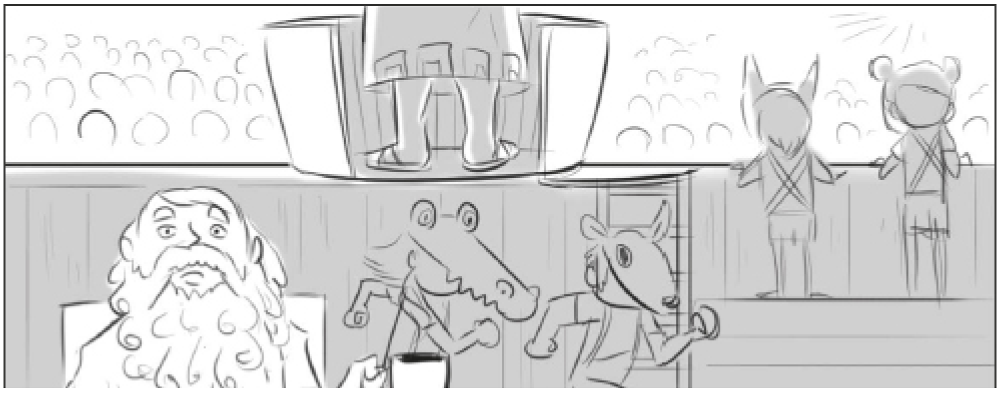
Storyboard for *Moonrise Kingdom* by Pat Harpin

The cutaway of the man with the coffee cup behind the stage and kids running behind him is omitted in the final movie, but features the same deadpan delivery. In the filmed scene, the CUs of the seated audience members happen earlier. In the two final panels of Page Nine, Sam is walking past many kids in animal costumes.

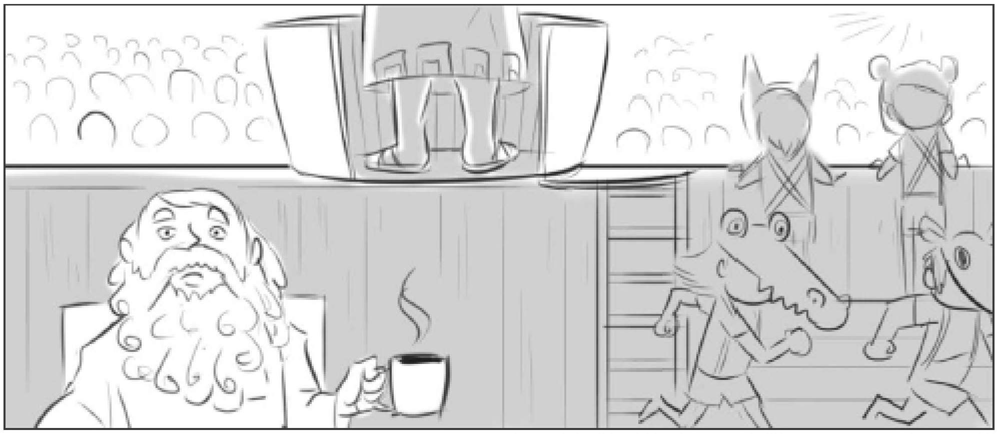


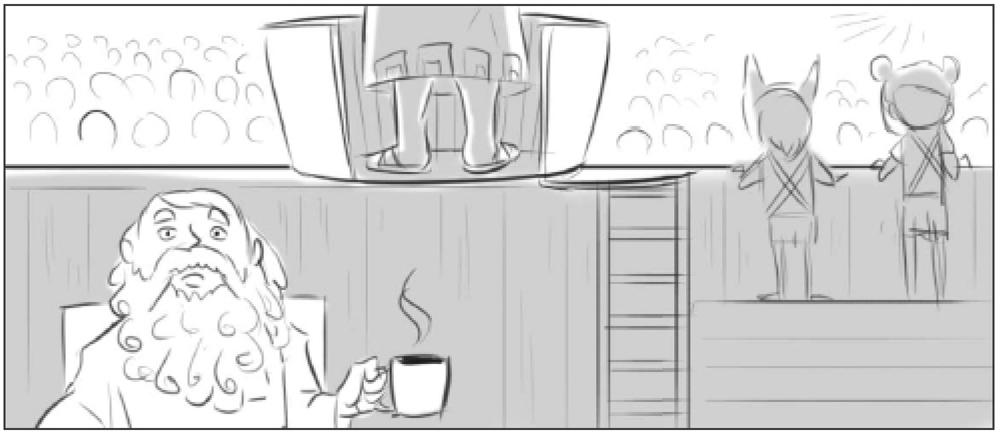


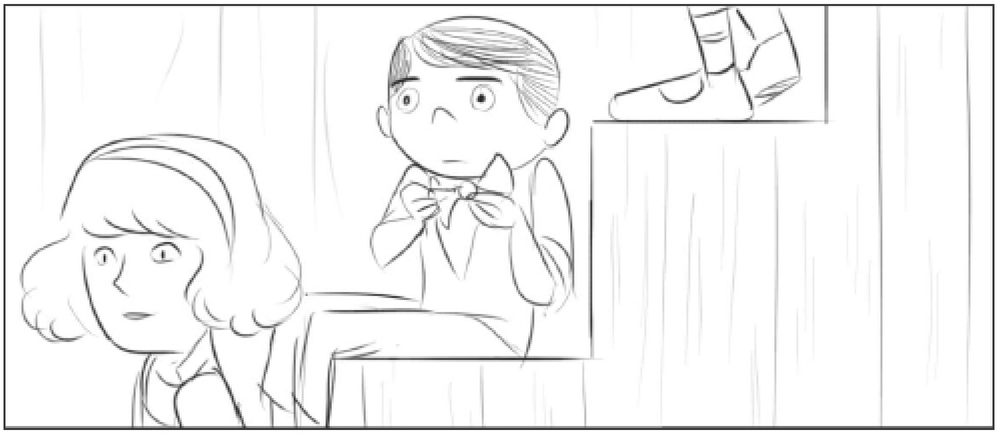


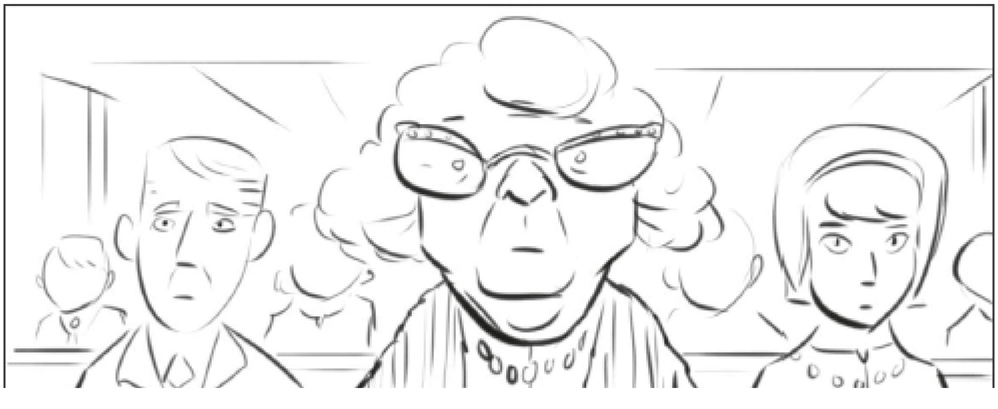


Storyboard for *Moonrise Kingdom* by Pat Harpin

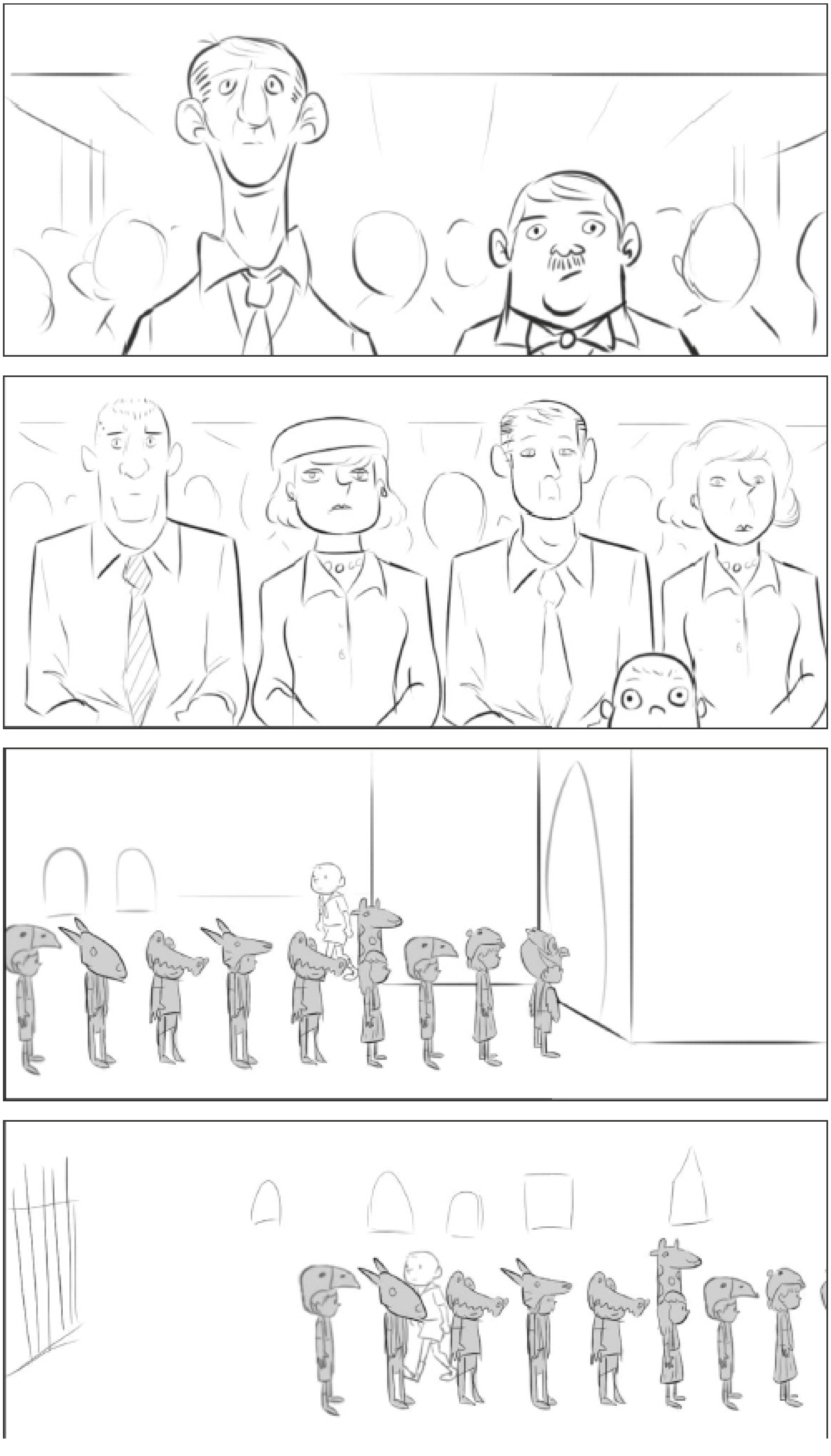








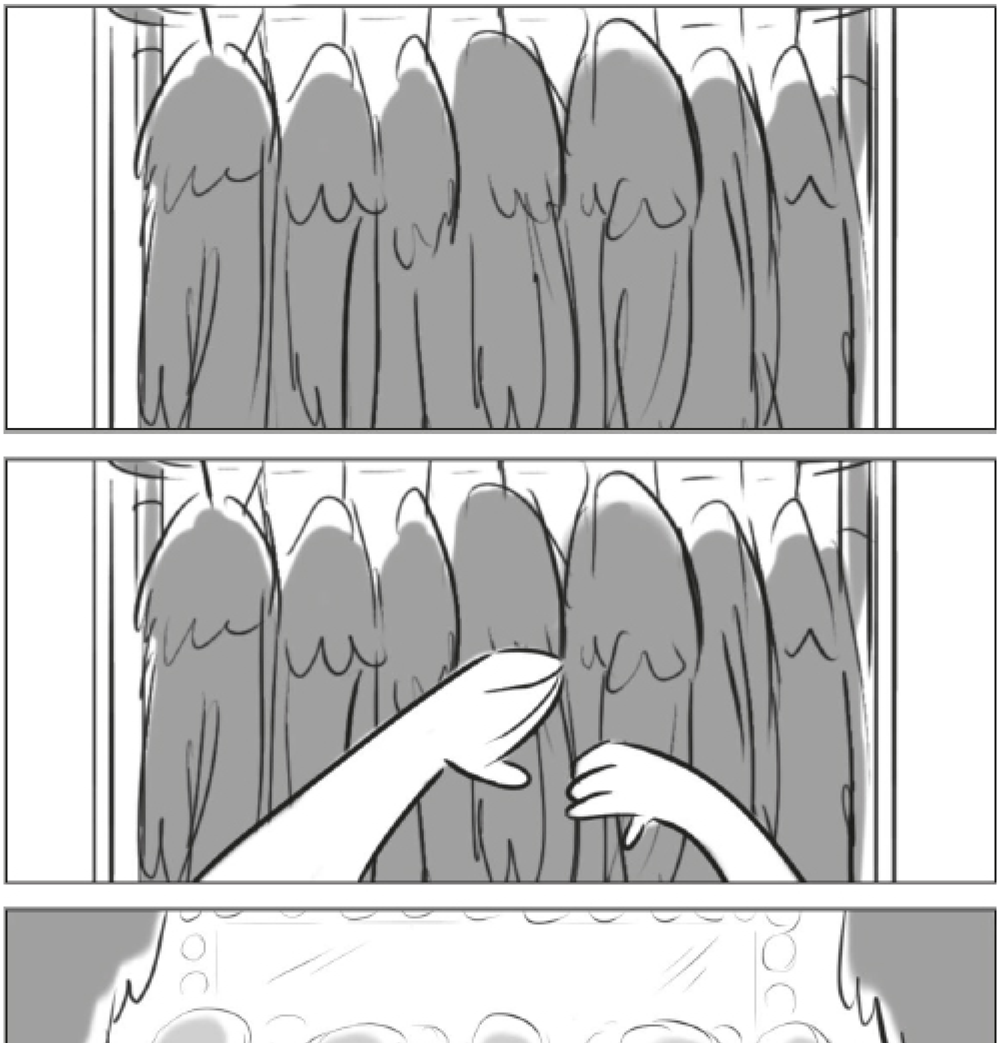
Storyboard for *Moonrise Kingdom* by Pat Harpin



Storyboard for *Moonrise Kingdom* by Pat Harpin

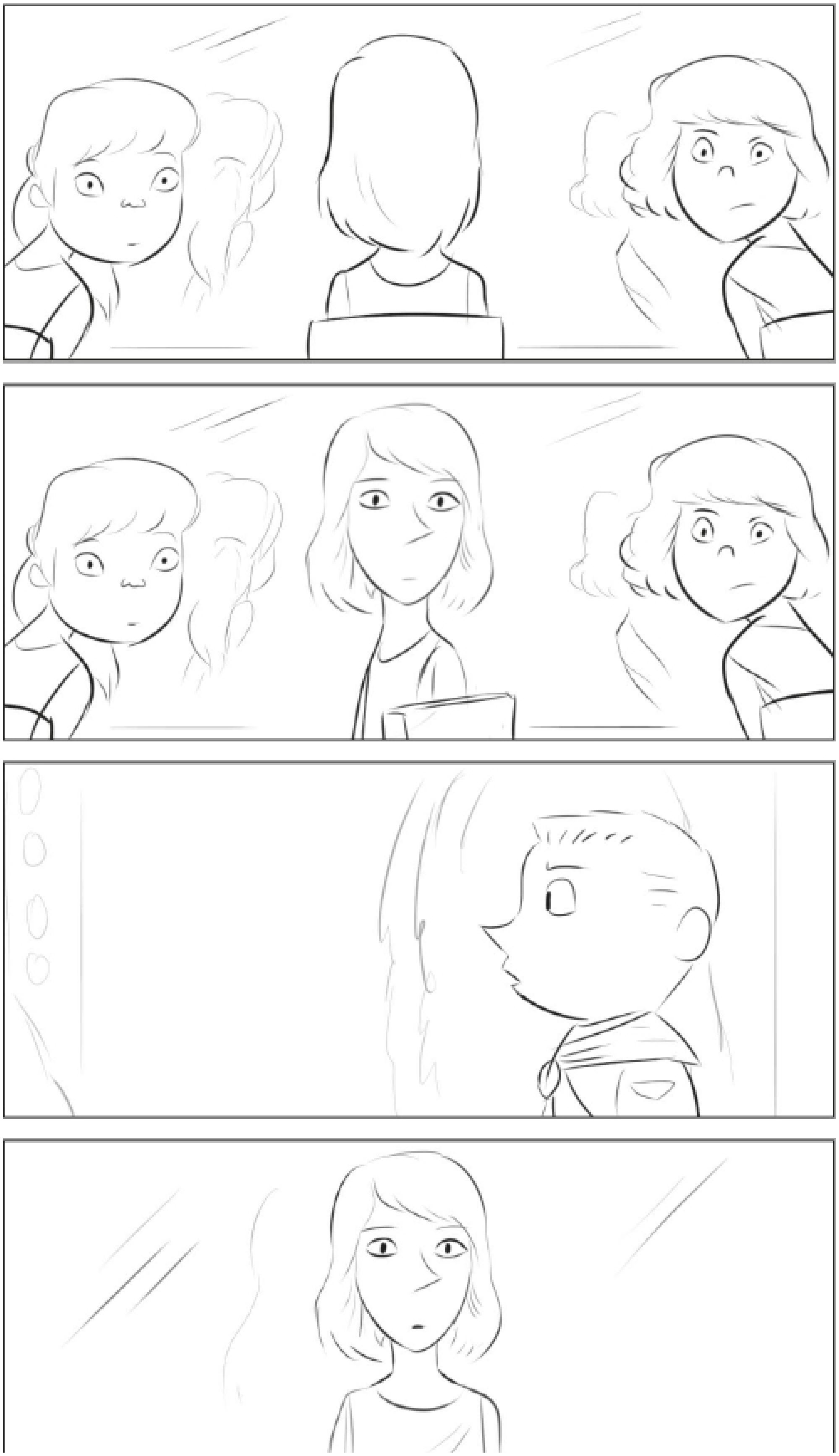
Moonrise Kingdom Storyboards: Part 2

Sam finds a dressing room in the basement hidden behind a rack of costumes. He pulls the costumes apart and sees five girls in bird costumes and makeup.



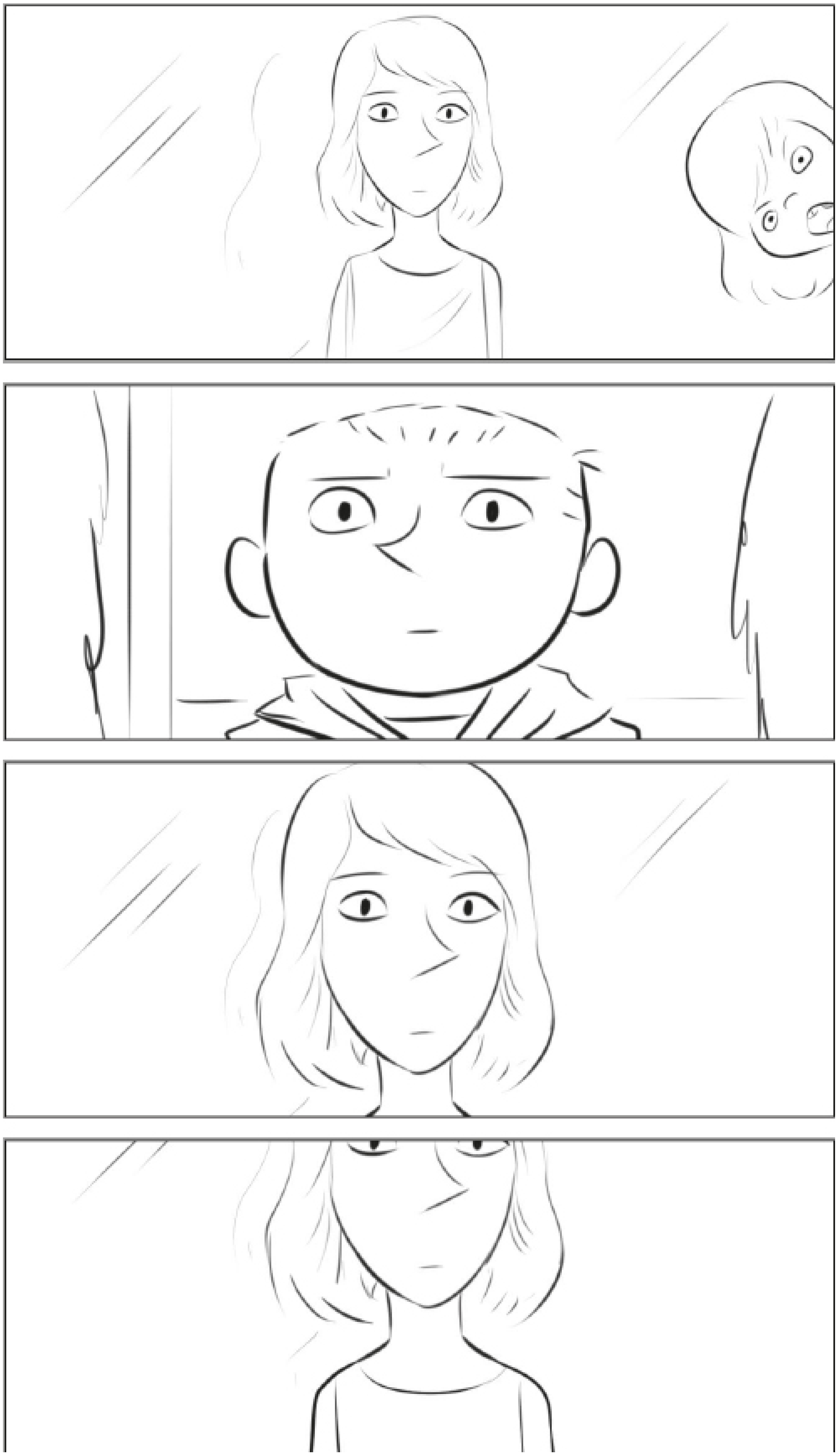
Storyboard for *Moonrise Kingdom* by Pat Harpin

The girls turn to see Sam, who just entered the room. Suzy turns last. Sam asks what kind of bird she is and she tells him she’s a raven.



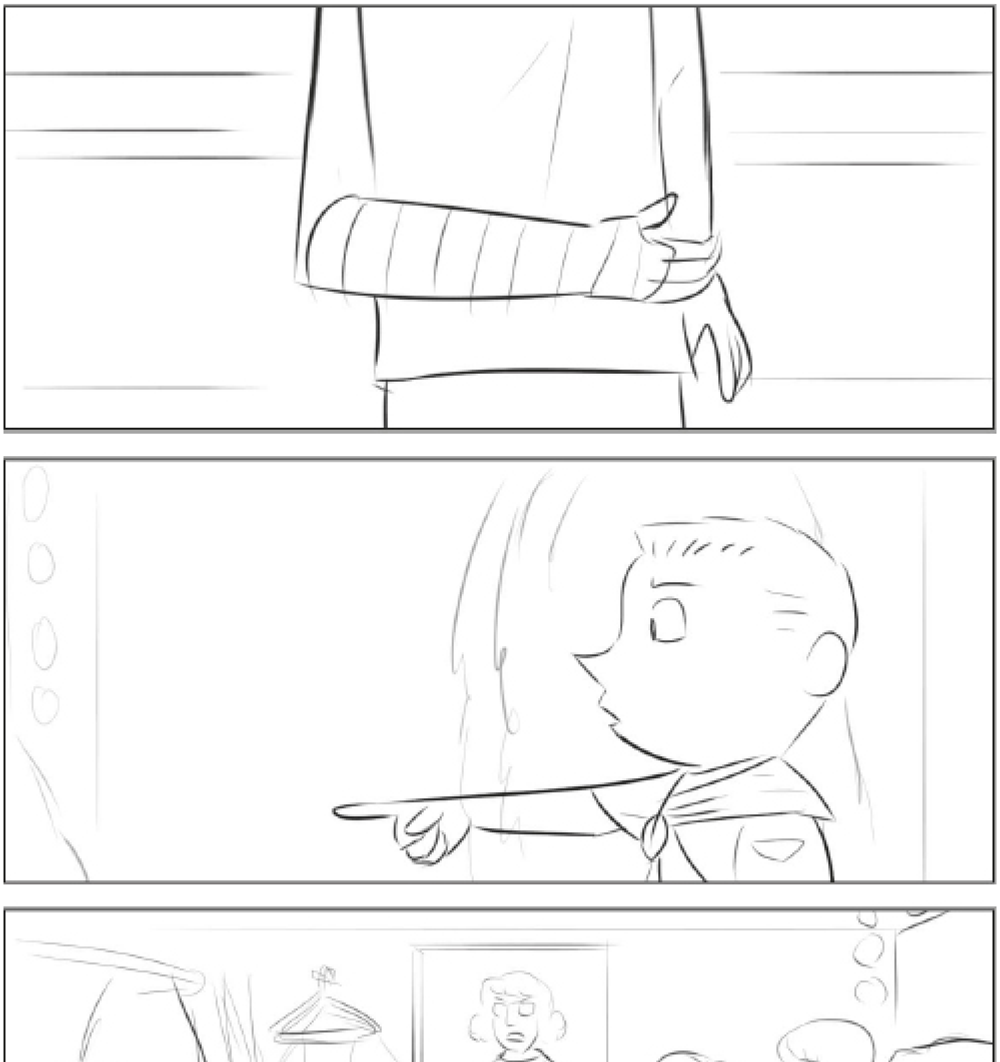
Storyboard for *Moonrise Kingdom* by Pat Harpin

Another girl tells Sam he’s not allowed in the dressing room. The camera moves in closer on Sam and Suzy. On the last frame the camera tilts down to Suzy’s bandaged arm.

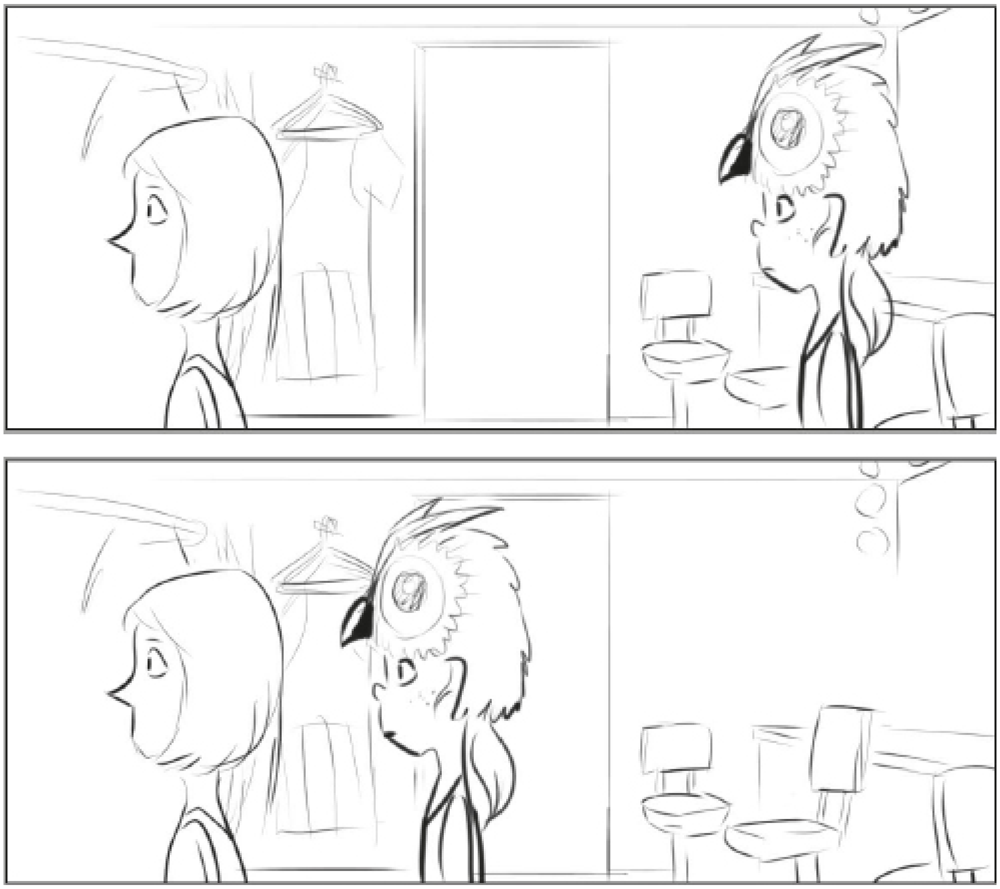


Storyboard for *Moonrise Kingdom* by Pat Harpin

Sam asks what happened to Suzy's hand. An adult comes in to get the girls. In the storyboard she says nothing, but in the movie she tells Sam to go back to his seat. Suzy and another girl linger behind in time for the girl to tell Suzy that Sam likes her.



Storyboard for *Moonrise Kingdom* by Pat Harpin



Storyboard for *Moonrise Kingdom* by Pat Harpin

21 Transitions

The connections between shots are as important as the shots themselves and usually signify changes in time and place in the narrative. Today, segues of almost every type are used, with the greatest type of experimentation going on in commercials and music videos. In all, there are only seven ways of joining two shots together. They are:

- The cut
- The fade in
- The dissolve
- The white-in
- The wipe
- The white-out (or any colored version of this)
- The fade out

The Cut

Habit and convention have established that the dissolve indicates a passage of time, while the cut is a present-tense segue. While this was an acceptable generalization for most of the films in the ’30s and ’40s, today there are many more exceptions. The cut has undergone the greatest change, and is used in much wider application in connecting different periods of time. Television has popularized techniques that speed up the plot, and the cut has become the connection of choice. One use that has become a favored technique in television (now in features, too) is the montage sequence, connected by cuts. Typically, the montage sequence covers hours rather than days or weeks. Take, for example, the scene in Steven Spielberg’s *Jaws* in which Officer Brody, Captain Quint, and Hooper assemble the shark cage onboard the fishing vessel, the *Orca*. The scene is made up of six shots each lasting 3 seconds for a total of about 18 seconds, compressing what would probably take half an hour. In this case, the compositions are composed angularly and record strong graphic contrasts in medium and close shots, alerting us to the fact that normal, real-time continuity is being interrupted. The result is a rhythmically compelling sequence that is vigorous yet smooth. Another use of this technique, using a single camera angle and composition, might show the construction of a house or the growth of a family, with weeks and years foreshortened into a few seconds. The result is time-lapse photography that can show months, years, or decades passing within seconds.

The Dissolve

The dissolve, once approaching the status of a cliché, has begun to look fresh again, having been replaced by the cut for many of its uses in recent years. Regardless, it’s best if the filmmaker disregards fashion and employs whatever technique does the best job in a given situation.

Because the dissolve can form a bridge between disparate times and places, however shaky the logic of the connection, it has always been thought of as a kind of Band-Aid for badly structured films.

While the practice in the continuity style is to hide the cut, the dissolve is intended to be seen or at least experienced. Dissolves can be any length but usually last anywhere from approximately 1/2 second (10–12 frames) to extremely expressive lengths of over a minute. The shortest dissolve possible, and one rarely seen today, is the so-called soft cut, a dissolve lasting only 1 to 10 frames. The soft cut was used in situations where a transition required smoothing, such as nature footage in a documentary. For example, the only available shots of a lion chasing a zebra might force the editor to combine jarring, fast-moving shots to convey the basic action. A dissolve could smooth the transitions but would be confusing and work against the speed of the action. A straight cut would produce jumpy results. In this case, the single-frame dissolve would be employed as a compromise. It would soften the cut but not slow down the action. Usually the soft cut is undetectable, and even most filmmakers cannot tell the difference. Its effect is subliminal.

Focus-In/Out

In a focus-in/out, the tail of one shot loses focus until the image is completely blurred and is dissolved to the next shot, which begins with a new blurred image that is then brought into focus. Technically, it’s a dissolve, but one that is concealed by another effect. Properly executed, the dissolve is invisible because the two unfocused shots are joined at a point where the images are too blurred to be identified. The loss of focus is usually gradual, and the dissolve blends the two shots together as if they were one. Of course, the viewer knows a bit of movie magic is taking place. The effect has often been used as a POV shot, indicating loss of consciousness. One version you've probably seen many times is the patient-in-an-operating-room shot. We share the patient's viewpoint as he is anesthetized and the operating room becomes a blur. Slowly the picture returns to sharpness, and we are in a recovery room hours later.

The Match Shot

Match shots are two adjacent shots that share a graphic element that is registered identically in each. Though described in many screenplays as a match cut, most often a dissolve links the shots. The dissolve helps to smooth out any imperfections in registration and lets the viewer enjoy the change more thoroughly. But this is not always the case. In *À bout de souffle* (*Breathless*), Jean-Luc Godard makes a match cut on Jean Seberg as she drives in a convertible with the top down. Suddenly the background changes from day to night though the car and driver remain in the same position — a very radical cut in its day. Interestingly, it combines two very different qualities: the disruptive time shift of the jump cut and the graphic smoothness of the match cut.

Wipes

A traditional wipe is rarely seen today unless the filmmaker wants to deliberately recall the Hollywood style of the '30s and '40s. In its most familiar form, the wipe is the cross-frame movement of a new shot over an old one and resembles a curtain being drawn. George Lucas used angular wipes in *Star Wars* — an homage to the serials made by B studios like Monogram and Republic, which inspired the movie.

Wipes can move in any direction, vertically, horizontally, or diagonally across the frame. Circles, squares, and spirals — any conceivable shape — can be used to remove one shot and introduce a new one. A wipe can be shaped to resemble a desired design element like a police badge or a keyhole expanding or contracting until one shot has replaced the other. *Flying Down to Rio* (1933), the movie that introduced the team of Fred

Astaire and Ginger Rogers, contains dozens of different wipes used throughout the course of the movie to combine scenes.

Another variation of the wipe, the push-off or push-over, has the incoming shot “pushing” the outgoing shot from the frame so that it appears to be moving intact across the frame. This differs from the traditional wipe, in which the new shot appears to move *over* the one it is replacing.

A wipe can also be combined with an element in the shot moving in the same direction and at the same rate — for example, a telephone pole or a tree. In this case, the leading edge of the wipe is matched to the movement of the pole or tree trunk. Cars, joggers, or an elevator door, anything moving across the frame, can motivate a wipe of this kind. A version of this type of wipe used in cartoons has an animated character pulling the new shot into place. A recent car commercial shows an outgoing shot of a car “torn” from the screen in strips as if it were paper, revealing a perfectly registered car of a different color underneath.

The Action Wipe

The action wipe lies somewhere between an optical wipe and a match cut, and is made in the camera or, to be more specific, in the editing room. The action wipe connects two shots in a scene rather than linking two scenes in different locations. In almost every case, this effect is used to move from a wide shot to a medium or close shot, making the cut smoother by what amounts to an “invisible” cut on action. What distinguishes this cut from a normal cut on action is that the action is not of the principal subject. Instead, some design element within the frame that moves between the camera and the principal subject provides the action. The element can be any object positioned close enough to the camera to completely block the lens while moving through the shot. Typically, the action would be shot twice with the movement the same in each shot and the angle of view identical, but with a change in frame size. Later the two shots would be connected at the point where the subject is blocked from our view. In recent years, action wipes have also been used to connect shots taken from different viewing angles and even different periods of time (Figure 21.1).

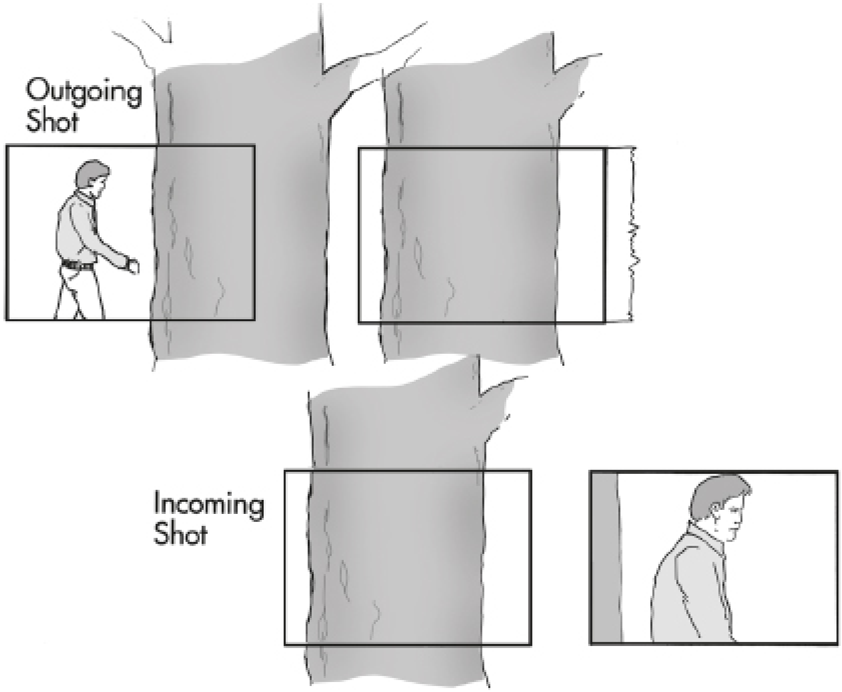


Figure 21.1: The action wipe.

As with the match shot, which is similar to the action wipe, a cut or dissolve can connect the shots in an action wipe. Usually a dissolve is used to make the effect as seamless as possible.

Transformations

In special cases, the transformation of the principal subject in a shot can be considered a transition. Strictly speaking, the transformation is not the joining of two separate shots — the definition of a transition — but there is a complete change of subject. Figure 21.2 is a series of transformations by the pioneer animator, Émile Cohl, from 1909.

Up until recently, this type of effect was so unusual that there was no reason to consider it anything but a novelty. Computer graphics, however, are now able to execute far more complex transformations between photographic images relatively easily. Portions of the frame, or the entire picture, can be broken down and reconstructed into a new photographic image smoothly with great textural and dynamic variation. Effects for TV commercials are designed for maximum impact to hold viewer attention. This is very nearly the opposite goal of transitions in the continuity style, but computer graphics are capable of any sort of image configuration if the time and energy are spent to execute it. We can expect much more of this in the future.

Fades

The fade to black and the fade up from black have the effect of setting episodes off from one another like chapter headings. In this respect, the purpose of the fade is fundamentally different from the dissolve or cut. The fade separates scenes, while the dissolve and cut connect scenes. Going to black and then coming out of black to picture is a complete departure from the narrative, though if it is done rapidly the pause is minimal.

A fade can employ pictorial elements in the scene. A typical use of this idea would be a scene in a room that ends with the lights being turned off. While still in black, the cut is made to the next scene, which could begin with a train coming out of the darkness of a tunnel.

White-In/White-Out/Color

Fades can be made to and from any color or made to white, an effect that John Huston used for the closing shot of *Prizzi's Honor*. The movie ends at a bright sunny window that slowly becomes blindingly white until the frame is completely bleached out. This is the end of the film, so we don't return to another scene, but obviously all that would be needed to do so is a white-in. This can be motivated by any bright element in the new shot like a bright sky or lamp. The white-out has a particularly ethereal quality, though there is no real convention attached to the mood it produces, unlike the dissolve, which tends toward the lyrical and elegiac.

The Freeze Frame

This effect differs from the other types of visual punctuation we've looked at in that it is usually employed as a period rather than a transition between scenes. The best-known use of the freeze frame is in Truffaut's *Les Quatre Cents Coups* (*The 400 Blows*) in the memorable final shot of Antoine Doinel alone on the beach. The elegiac quality of the shot, the sense of finality and inescapable fate became a favorite effect in the '60s and was so overused that it has almost completely disappeared. More recently, the freeze frame has served a more practical use as a species of POV when used to show the viewpoint of a photographer taking a picture. Usually we are watching some action when a burst of white and the sound of a shutter closing indicate a strobe flash and the moment of exposure. The action freezes momentarily, showing us the photo that the photographer desires. The effect was used well in Robert Altman's *M*A*S*H* when Hawkeye and Pierce break in on an officer who is shacked up with a Japanese girl in order to take compromising pictures. We see the pictures as a series of freeze frames as the officer madly scrambles to pull on his trousers.

Montage

"Montage" is a problematic term. To the Europeans all editing is montage; to the early Soviet filmmakers, Kuleshov, Pudovkin, and Eisenstein, it meant their special brand of associative editing; or, in the words of Eisenstein, "Montage is an idea that arises from the collision of independent shots."

In the United States and Great Britain, montage has its own special meaning: a brief sequence of linking devices, usually dissolves, used to convey the passage of time or a series of locations. It is this transitional use that is of interest to us here.

Actually, montage of this type is not so much a linking device as a condensed narrative, a form of visual shorthand that uses actual transitions (dissolves, cuts, fade-ins/outs) in rapid succession to link ideas. Montage frequently uses symbolic images to represent change — for instance, piles of coins and dollars that grow larger dissolved against images of the stock exchange and industry to show the financial rise of a character. Slavko Vorkapich, an immigrant from Yugoslavia, became known as a montage specialist in the United States during the late silent and early sound periods creating these types of sequences. Vorkapich, a gifted filmmaker, was interested in experimental films and the avant-garde film movement in Europe. Like other filmmakers experimenting with new techniques, he found work creating new versions of standard narrative sequences depicting dreams, drunkenness, after-death experiences, altered states, and fantastic realms.

The montage is not used much today. When a long period of time is condensed to a short sequence, cuts are preferred to dissolves. Montage that conveys an idea or concept, as in the pile-of-money example, is rarer still, leaving an opportunity to experiment with old techniques in new ways.

Split-Screen Effects

Actually, the split-screen is not exactly a transitional effect, though it is used to join images that would otherwise be seen in separate shots. In 1927, the French director Abel Gance used the technique in several sequences in his epic biography, *Napoléon*, turning the screen into a triptych. He called this early widescreen process Polyvision. Three projectors were used to obtain the necessary width for panoramic shots, but they could be used in any combination, each showing a different image or a center image flanked by two identical shots. Occasional use of the split-screen was used in the silent era to show two sides of a telephone conversation simultaneously, and a related technique, created with a multi-image lens, multiplied a single image in a revolving circular pattern. This became a standard representation for hallucinations and nightmares. Later, Busby Berkeley would use this device for purely graphic design.

Split-screen effects were never widely used and all but disappeared by the ’40s. The technique was resurrected in the ’60s in John Frankenheimer’s *Grand Prix* with the screen split into varying patterns of mortices. Anyone familiar with multi-image slideshows would recognize the technique, and though this type of multimedia presentation has continued to develop and thrive in corporate and advertising communication, there has been no crossover to narrative film.

The only director who has continually experimented with the split-screen is Brian De Palma, who has made a genuine effort to use the effect to discover new ways of telling a story. The effect is usually done as an optical at a lab after the film has been shot, but for compositional reasons it is probably best to compose the frame with the split-screen in mind. Simple split-screen effects can also be created in any camera that can be accurately back-wound, and are therefore well within the means of independent filmmakers.

22 Format

The Frame

Painters, graphic artists, and photographers are able to vary the size of their work surface to suit the subject, from life-size murals to locket-size portraits, even though the viewpoint is fixed. The filmmaker finds himself in the opposite situation. He can vary his viewpoint within a film but not the shape or size of the frame that encloses it. He does have a choice, however, in the format he uses.

The proportions of the film frame are called the aspect ratio, a description of the relationship between the horizontal and vertical dimensions of the picture. The aspect ratio basically determines the shape of the image, which is almost always a rectangle of varying proportions, depending on the format.

A Brief History of Formats

George Eastman first made stripfilm available in the 1890s, and since then there have been over one hundred different systems for photographing and projecting motion pictures. In the silent era, while the studios were just beginning to monopolize the making and distribution of motion pictures, there were a variety of formats, though the predominant aspect ratio was 1.33:1. The confines of this rectangle were not flexible enough for filmmakers like D.W. Griffith, who occasionally masked a portion of the frame horizontally or vertically to compose specific scenes. More common temporary maskings of the frame included iris effects that turned the screen into a small soft-edged circle or oval, an effect similar to a close-up for directing our attention to a point on the screen. The most impressive format experiment in the silent period was the Polyvision process used for Abel Gance's *Napoléon*. This was mentioned in the previous chapter because of its use of split-screen effects, but these compositional devices were not the purpose for using three projectors or widening the screen. Gance's main interest was in providing a monumental viewing experience that overwhelmed the audience. While the screen could be stretched to include

Napoleon's armies, German director F.W. Murnau preferred to condense the screen width to a square for a smaller film like the lyrical *Sunrise* (1927). Despite these and other experiments, the 1.33:1 proportion remained the all-purpose format throughout the silent period based on a film gauge of 35 mm. In 1932, the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences made this the standard aspect ratio, and, because they now had sound to consider, took some of the available width of the frame for the optical track. To maintain the 1.33:1 ratio, the height of the frame was lowered, and the result was the Academy aperture, with an actual ratio of 1.37:1. This was the standard for nearly 20 years.

In the 1950s, the motion-picture industry responded to the economic threat of television with a whole array of widescreen systems designed to entice people out of their living rooms and back into the theaters. This was a repeat of a similar trend way back in the late '20s and early '30s, when the sound era began. In fact, many of the widescreen formats adopted in the '50s were developed or suggested two decades earlier. Among these were several film gauges that were briefly in use, including the Paramount process (56 mm), Spoor Natural Vision (63 mm), and Fox Grandeur (70 mm). These and other innovations — stereophonic sound for one — might have become standardized in the '30s had it not been for the Depression, which caused the studios, who originally backed the changes, to rethink their plans. Motivated by more conservative financial expectations, the studios abandoned the costly replacement of existing equipment.

Twenty years later, when television threw down the gauntlet, most of the technical preparation for widescreen motion pictures had already been worked out. Not that the technological problems were particularly difficult; motion-picture cameras and projectors represent nineteenth-century technology (essentially mechanical), and while there have been refinements, no major breakthroughs have been made in the basic design of the camera or projector, with the exception of the IMAX rolling loop system. Some of the widescreen systems developed over the last four decades are: Cinerama, originally a three-camera, three-projector system similar to Abel Gance's Polyvision; Todd-AO; CinemaScope; VistaVision; Techniscope; Super Panavision 70, and Ultra Panavision 70. Only a few of these systems are in use today, and a mere list of trademarks does not begin to cover the complex subject of available film and camera systems until the mid-2000s, when digital cameras and projection changed everything. As of this writing, film is still in use for shooting theatrical features; however, digital is for all practical purposes the dominant technology for commercial filmmaking.

The development of digital cameras and projection formats has been influenced by, and closely follows, the traditional film formats that directly preceded it. Until fairly recently, there were three film proportions in general use: 1.85:1, 1.66:1, and 1.75:1. In the United States, 1.85:1 was the unofficial standard, while 1.66:1 was popular in Europe. Of the smaller formats, 16 mm, Super 16, and Super 8 were widely used, utilizing aspect ratios hovering around the 1.33:1 ratio. 16 mm can be used in the Academy and widescreen formats, which was the original reason for the introduction of Super 16 in the early 1970s. Super 16 uses more of the available negative and, therefore, produces a sharper, less grainy image.

Digital Acquisition

Movies can be filmed but can also be made entirely in the computer without a physical camera in sight, and so the popular term “digital acquisition” was born. Whether real or virtual, digital cameras output frames, the equivalent of the film negative in sizes measured in pixels. Shorthand for various formats are names like 2k and 4k or image sizes that are 2,000 or 4,000 pixels in size respectively. The most common format is 1920 × 1080 with an aspect ratio of 16:9, which is almost identical to 1.85:1. The aspect ratio is independent of the resolution so a 16:9 image can be composed of a few thousand pixels or millions of pixels. That’s where the notion of megapixels (a term often mentioned in the still-camera world) originated. The 2k and 4k image sizes mentioned above are 2 megapixels and 8 megapixels. The math is simple: the megapixel size of a digital image is found by multiplying the pixel width by the height of the image. A 2k image is 2048 × 1080 pixels, or 2,212 million pixels when multiplied. This is rounded off to 2 megapixels for simplicity. A 4k image is 4096 × 2160 or 8,857,360 pixels, which is rounded off to 8 megapixels.

While we used to speak of film resolution in terms of the size of the negative such as 16 mm, 35 mm, or IMAX, the digital equivalent of the film negative is the camera sensor. Their size is referred to in terms of megapixels, and basically represents the level of detail captured in each image. Professional still cameras such as Nikon, Canon, or Sony DSLRs have cameras with sensors in the 12-megapixel to 50-megapixel range. In motion pictures, the current crop of professional cameras are in the 4-megapixel to 8-megapixel range. This number is always going up, and there is no reason not to capture more and more information as time goes on. The driver here is the human need to replicate reality.

Digital Projection

Beginning in the early 2000s, the major US studios made the primarily financial decision to begin the biggest infrastructure change in the delivery and presentation of motion picture since movies began. Digital "prints" have replaced film in 98.2% of cinemas worldwide as of May 3, 2016. Digital prints don't wear out compared with a film print that remains pristine through only a few dozen showings before the delicate emulsion surface is scratched or chipped. Digital prints can be rapidly produced and are far less expensive than film prints. Digital projection does not have gate jitter, the microvibration seen by the audience as a high-frequency image movement, a consequence of mechanically transporting film and magnifying the frame several thousand times. Unlike a film print, a digital print is sharp across the entire screen when projected. This is not possible with mechanical film mechanisms. However, there remain filmmakers such as Quentin Tarantino who are trying to preserve the traditional film experience in arthouses. At the time of this writing, while film is still used for some feature films at the insistance of a few A-list directors, digital dominates. In 2015, approximately 85% of the 100 top-grossing movies were shot digitally. Sadly, in the near future, silver chemistry and the beauty of a film print will only be found in specialty presentations and venues.

Technically, 16:9 (1.77:1) is the international format of HDTV and Full HD. This is primarily a television and computer-monitor standard, but has become an alternative to 1:85 in the theaters. Typically, the dimensions of 16:9 in consumer and prosumer cameras is 1920 × 1080 pixels, even if it's captured at a higher resolution and downsampled. But this was barely established in the early 2000s, when 4k and higher resolutions were introduced, including 4k UHD, 5k UHD, and 8k UHD. Expect greater resolution and higher frame rates.

At the same time, digital resolution is evolving, and frame rates are being tested far beyond that of 24 frames per second (fps), the sound film standard for nearly a century. Television is a bit more complex, but uses a 30fps rate derived from 60 fields per second. New frame rates of 48fps and 60fps have been suggested for years, and recently frame rates of up to 120fps are in development. This is a controversial subject, with the eventual goal of replicating reality with higher frame rates versus the traditional look of films projected at 24fps. The so-called “live” look of higher frame rates as seen in soap operas and newscasts is off-putting for many viewers. One of the best descriptions of the perceptual difference between high and low frame rates is that film (24fps) is past tense and television (30fps) is present tense. When viewed, 24fps seems to be an experience that has happened in memory while faster frame rates tell us the presentation is happening as we watch. There is debate whether the preference by some people for 24fps is or is not a conditioned response, the result of seeing the slower frame rate for nearly a century. Expect this and other experiments in formats to continue. The new digital projectors in theaters can be reprogrammed in many ways that were impossible with film projectors, allowing for more experimentation with formats.

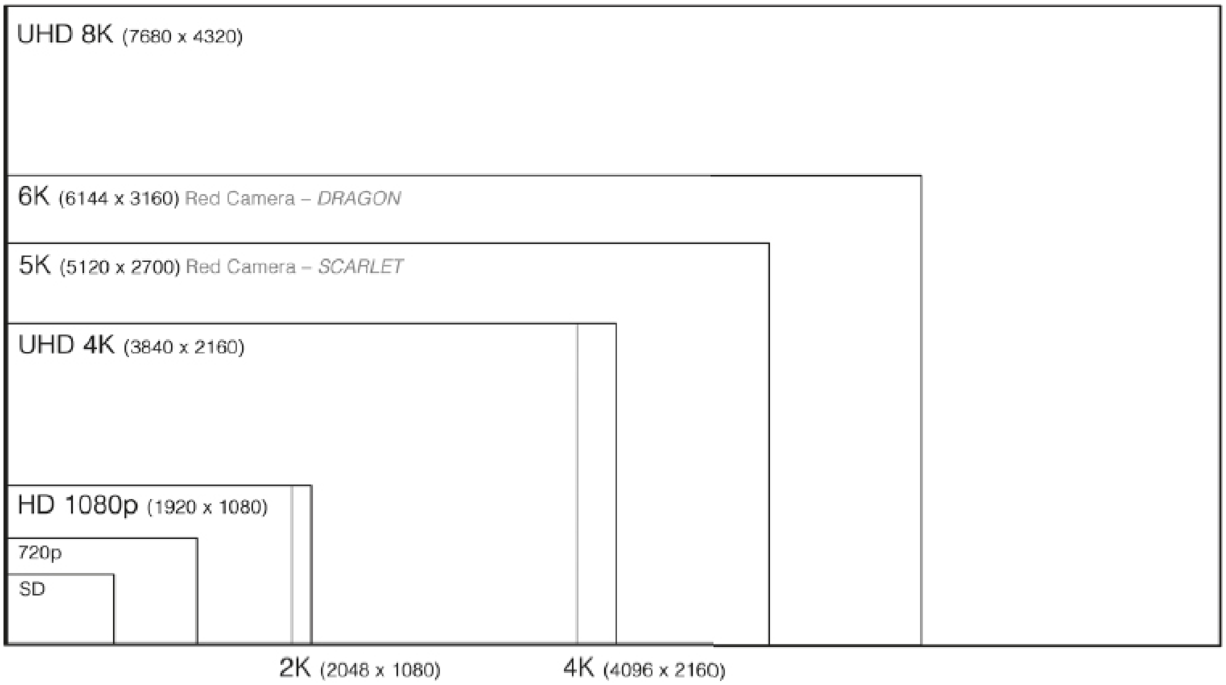
Stereoscopic

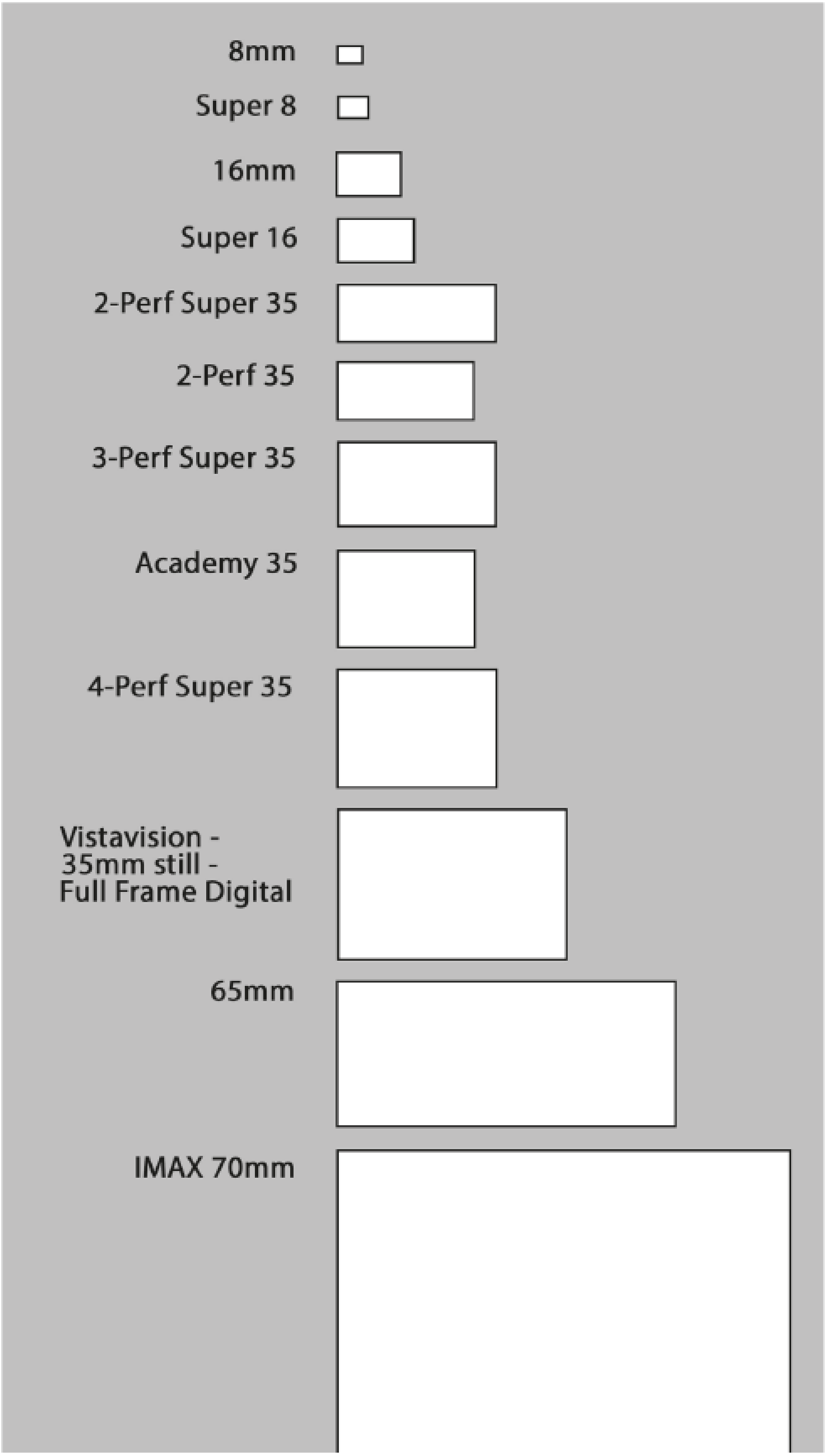
The digital projection infrastructure transformation coincided with and made possible a widespread comeback of stereoscopic viewing, which now appears to be short-lived. The studios could charge more for a stereoscopic presentation and so this became part of the upgrade to digital in most cineplexes, including the need to provide reusable eyewear. Similarly, the TV manufacturers got behind the new technology and began making 3D flat-screens. However, despite an initial interest from the mainstream audience the popularity of stereoscopic viewing has dropped off significantly. Why?

While the technical virtues of digital projection allowed for improvements in both the capture and projection of stereoscopic films, the required glasses have never been popular. Far from unobtrusive, either shutter glasses or polarized light filtration reduce screen brightness for the viewer. It’s noticeable even to the casual viewer. The cost of shooting or post-processing stereoscopic is not inexpensive, and contrary to what has been said by various promoters of stereoscopic movies, it does not significantly add to or change the fundamentals of continuity style filmmaking. In fact, the rapid loss of interest in stereoscopic movies is partially the victim of the human visual system. Namely, adaptation. Unless the stereoscopic experience exaggerates the effect of depth in shots that seem like stunts, the brain successfully reduces the effect. It does this because the various processes needed to fool the eye are unnatural and tax our viewing system. For most shots and staging, the stereoscopic effect diminishes once the movie begins. As the neuroscience of perception has still not produced a comprehensive understanding of vision, the nature of the perceptual experience of stereoscopic viewing is unknown. As both a financial opportunity and a useful innovation, stereoscopic has failed to deliver.

On the following pages are comparisons of film formats and digital formats. While film formats are a matter of history, the digital formats in the following diagram are part of a constantly (and rapidly) evolving science of image capture and presentation. It’s guaranteed they will be quite different within ten years. Finally, the list of film and digital formats is not comprehensive. What follows is a general introduction to formats, laying out the major trends.

digital formats


UHD 8K (7680 x 4320)
6K (6144 x 3160) Red Camera – DRAGON
5K (5120 x 2700) Red Camera – SCARLET
UHD 4K (3840 x 2160)
HD 1080p (1920 x 1080)
720p
SD
2K (2048 x 1080)
4K (4096 x 2160)


8mm
Super 8
16mm
Super 16
2-Perf Super 35
2-Perf 35
3-Perf Super 35
Academy 35
4-Perf Super 35
Vistavision -
35mm still -
Full Frame Digital
65mm
IMAX 70mm

23 Shadowing

This section includes a quick start for new directors staging actors on set without storyboards or previs to consult. First, let's shadow a director. Shadowing is the term given to the practice of a director-in-training being allowed to follow an actual director for a few days while filming. So you just got the call sheet outlining the day's schedule. We'll start with a short description of a director's typical day and then we'll look at a series of ideas to expand your staging chops. These are ideas based on staging examples from earlier chapters, but packaged as simple solutions you can easily remember. Let's go. It's 7:00 AM and you need to be on set.

The movie where you will shadow the director is shooting at one location (multiple rooms in a suburban home). The scene involves five actors. It's a simple setup. Two police officers come to a home where a 911 call was made by a teenaged girl to stop her parents from fighting. There's no violence and no real reason to call 911 but the girl has nowhere else to turn. Of course when the police arrive, the teen's parents are furious at her.

This has all been worked out in a storyboard based on a specific home secured as the location, but at the last moment, a new house is substituted. The layout of the new home is so different that the storyboard showing long dolly moves is not going to work. The director won't see the new location until he arrives there early on the day of the shoot, requiring him to improvise.

A day of filming with a professional crew follows the following basic steps: Blocking, lighting, rehearsal, and shooting.

> **7:00 AM**
> Crew arrives. After grabbing coffee and a donut at the craft services table, the grips and cinematographer (DP) begin to scope out the interiors and what windows need to be blocked to keep out sunlight. The sun will be replaced by artificial lights. Equipment is unloaded from trucks and staged in the driveway and garage. Set dressing begins for areas the crew knows they will have to shoot. However, they need

the director to explain the basic blocking of the scene now that the storyboards are only partially accurate.

The director, cinematographer, production manager, and line producer now need to finalize the staging areas. Originally, the open floor plan of the old location had wide openings between the kitchen, the front door and entranceway, and the living room. This provided room for the tracking shots. Conversely, the new location is made up of separate rooms connected by narrow hallways and doors that are not dolly friendly, and this will add a lot of time to the setup. The line producer asks what is most important to the director: the tracking shots or keeping the teen hidden in the kitchen when the police arrive, where she can observe without being seen. The director agrees to give up the tracking shots. He's most interested in the teen being able to observe the police and her parents secretly. The director, cinematographer, line producer, and production manager begin walking through the scene and lining up shots. Often, actors' stand-ins are used at this point. The director will use a director's finder (a lens simulating what the camera will see) as they walk through the action of the scene. They begin to see technical issues with each new choice they consider.

The typical limitations the crew must deal with include where to hide lights and where to lay dolly track. Film crews are amazing at making almost any directorial request possible, but it's always a matter of time and money. Lighting for a tracking shot may take more time than for a locked-off shot, and the line producer may tell the director they will have to limit some other part of the plan. The original plan had the teen on the first floor and the parents on the second floor. Now the director sees that he can put the teen upstairs observing from the hallway looking down to the front door when the police arrive. The prop master will move a large indoor plant from the patio up to the balcony so the girl has a place to hide when the police arrive.

A few other decisions of this kind are made and it's now 8:15 AM. The director goes over the script and new shot list with the assistant director, script supervisor, and production manager. These professionals will ask detailed questions about every change in the scene so that story continuity is maintained.

8:45 AM
The actors arrive. They are met by the director and sent to makeup. The plan is to get to a first shot by 10:15.

9:30 AM
The new shot order is confirmed and requires bounce lighting into the front door area. The first shots will be the police arriving. The front of the house is cleared and a rented squad car positioned in front of the house. The director and DP now discuss more details of the shot. A new problem arises. The squad car is not visible from the best camera angle for the front door because there's a tree in the way. The director and the cinematographer find a solution that requires a camera move. While this is being discussed, the line producer tells the cinematographer the tree can be digitally removed and a digital squad car added, but it will cost $5,000. Including the squad car in the shot is not critical to the story so the idea is scrapped. No squad car, just the police at the front door.

10:15 AM
The two actors playing the police are in uniform and the actors playing the teen's parents arrive after makeup. Everyone is in costume and ready for rehearsal. The director likes to give very little direction initially; he wants the actors to perform as they would if they were in a real situation. The director wants to see how everyone will interact. He hopes to observe some unscripted natural behavior from his actors that he can ask them to repeat. The director tells the actors to only give 50%, and to just walk through the scene. They do this with the camera setup and because it's a digital camera, they record the rehearsal. After a few rehearsals, the director has some new ideas. The father of the teen in the movie goes to answer the door, but stops partway in the foyer when he sees the police through the window. He looks up at the balcony where the teen is hiding. Her bedroom is on the second floor. This is not in the script, but the director thinks this hesitation is great. It tells the audience that when there's trouble the father instinctively suspects his teen

daughter is involved. This means adjusting the dolly move to capture this new moment.

10:45 AM
Everyone wants to get the shot done before the noon lunch break. After a few moments' dolly rehearsal, they shoot the first take. With time taken for coverage, the scene is completed by noon. This includes a second handheld camera taken up to the second floor, where the teen's POV shots are recorded with the two police officers and the teen's parents in the shot. These are shot during rehearsal because lip synch won't be seen at this distance. Distance and dialogue can be added later in postproduction.

1:00 PM
After lunch, the new shot is being setup. This is the fight that sets off the whole scene. It was supposed to be shot in a bedroom, but the director now has the scene staged in the kitchen. The director begins working out the blocking with the cinematographer and they decide they can start the scene in the porch, following the father into the kitchen, where the argument with his wife begins. The director rehearses the actors playing the parents into the kitchen and lets them walk through the scene. Again, he tells them not to give him their full emotional intensity. The teen's reaction to the fight while in her bedroom will be shot on another day. The teen's bedroom will be a stage set since it is used in several scenes, justifying the expense of the build.

The rehearsal in the kitchen is going well, but it's centered around the kitchen table and seems too contained for the director. He wants to show the wife's impatience so he asks the actress to respond by using more space and not standing so close to the husband. The director points to two moments in the scene when the wife can just walk a few yards away in frustration and turn her back on her husband. He tells her to play it like she's a caged animal. He's building the case that the wife wants to leave the relationship, but has not acknowledged that to herself yet. So shaking her head and just walking out for a moment is stronger than the words in the script. The director now has the staging he wants, but the lighting has to be adjusted since the actress walks over to a window. There are a couple of tricky camera moves to make this work. There is now a tech rehearsal with the stand-in actors.

2:30 PM
The actors come back and do a couple of camera rehearsals, but the timing is tricky. They shoot the rehearsal and look at it. There are some modest adjustments and a line of dialogue is changed. Now everyone is ready to go for the shot.

This is a longer scene than the front door scene and takes a couple of hours to complete. The actors are given a short break to refresh since the scene is emotionally draining. The director would like more time, but the actors are losing their energy. The earliest takes were best. The footage is reviewed by the director and producer and they feel they have what they need.

4:30 PM
There are some pickup shots they can shoot with the wife taking trash bags to the garage, and these shots are shot with a handheld camera outside. Meanwhile, the next big scene is back in the foyer when the teen's father calls her downstairs. This is a relatively short scene because the girl does not come down. She climbs out the window of her bedroom. The father will go upstairs, but that's the last moment to be shot in the house. The story now moves to the teen's escape.

5:30 PM
Since the foyer was already lit, it only takes about 20 minutes for the new setup to be ready for the rehearsal. The cast is brought back in. The scene takes 30 minutes to shoot. The cast is let go. However, the director and DP don't wrap quite yet. They get coverage of details in the house and potential moody cutaways and POV shots of the interiors. The exterior of the house will be a different home in another city.

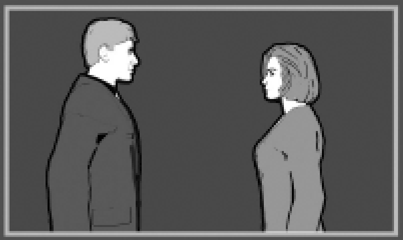
7:00 PM
It's a wrap. The crew begins breaking down the gear.

This is a fairly typical day's shooting of simple scenes. An action or VFX picture will have many scenes with all the same story and actor concerns, but far more technical considerations. The quiet time with the actors is harder for the director to find.

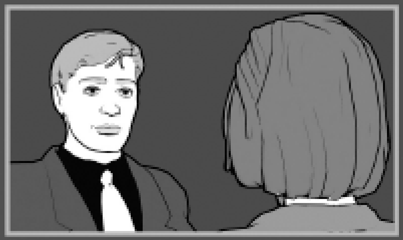
A director has many things on his mind when directing, but when it comes to blocking, once the actors move through the scene more or less how they would act if they weren't filming, the director has to take reality and make it work for the camera. There are a few basic techniques the director can rely on to help do this. We've already discussed them, but while explaining them in detail is necessary, the following short cuts boil them down to very simple concepts.

24 Short Cuts

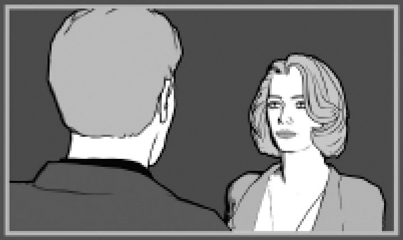
basic coverage



Anne enters frame



Over-the-shoulder 1

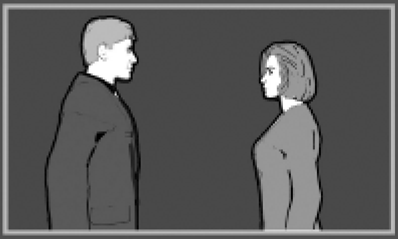


Over-the-shoulder 2

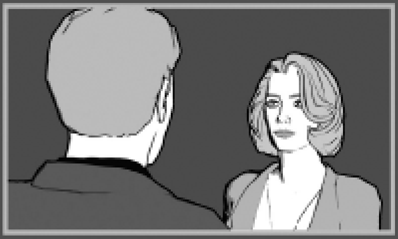
All the action takes place in a very confined space; essentially, a five-foot circle typical of televison staging for many programs. This approach is fast to light and the background does not need as many extras or set dressing. The downside is that this staging does not help convey the sense that the action is happening in the real world.

In the following quick fixes, we'll look at ways to expand and improve the basic coverage we're using here.

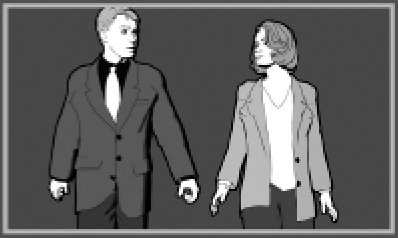
walking & talking



Scene begins and we go to coverage…



Series of OTS, and SRS coverage shots while characters speak.

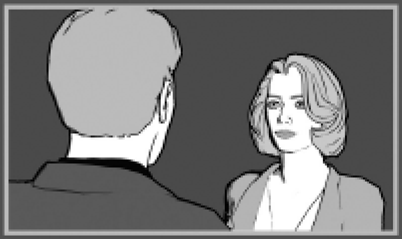


Moving shot: Dialogue continues as they walk together until the end of the scene.

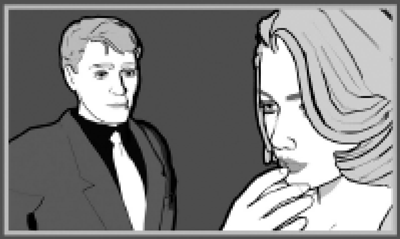
Our base coverage is staged in a five-foot circle where the dialogue is spoken. We looked at a variation having Anne approach from a distance. We looked at a second variation where we connected two separate poses.

The panels above show a static pose joined to a *moving* pose. In this approach the dialogue is spoken in the base coverage circle, and as the two characters walk away side by side dialogue continues. We could just as easily have the moving pose first, ending in the base coverage circle as a static shot. The earlier variations could also be added; for example, the current static/moving shot order could begin with Anne approaching camera, instead of the static shot.

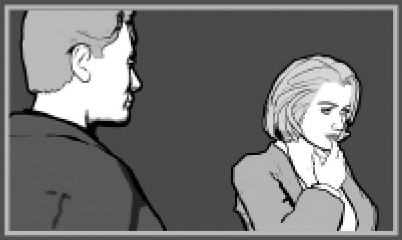
pose to pose



Base pose
(Standard OTS)



Pose two

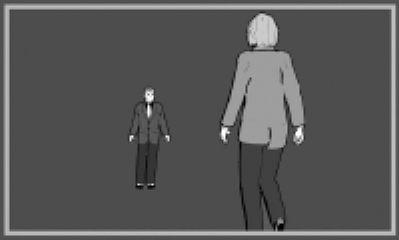


Pose two with new
camera angle

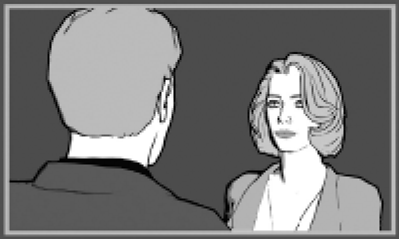
Your actors arrive. You don’t have a storyboard. Set up the scene for basic coverage. Then set up another staging that you think will work with the second half of the scene. Now you have two poses, but you can have more, of course. The actors will connect them. They may be resistant if it feels awkward, but if you think of emotional moments when a change in staging supports the story, then set that pose up. The actors and cinematographer collaborate with the director to work this out.

The takeaway here is that you learn to think in poses from the camera view. You can build complex and intricate staging by connecting poses.

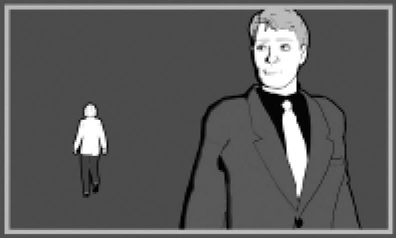
open it up



Anne enters frame



Over-the-shoulder 1
(OTS)



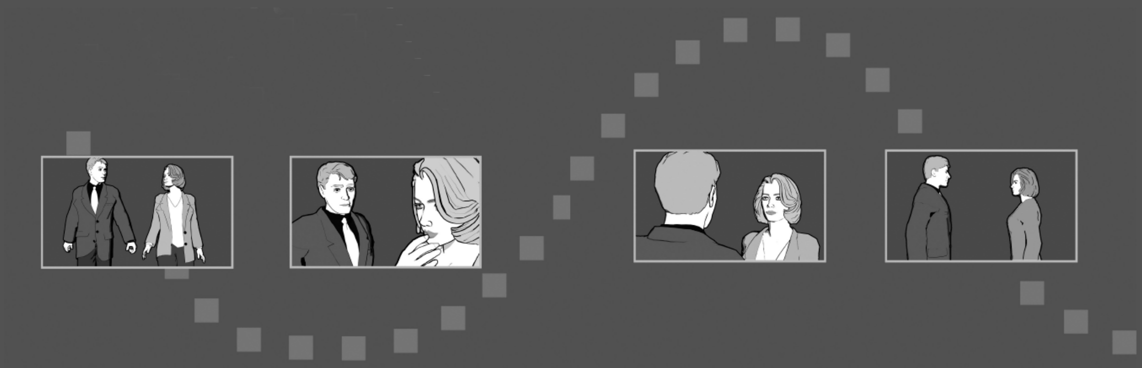
Anne exits the frame

Try using an approach shot where a character walks to the base staging area. This can replace the master shot, although you will shoot one for protection.

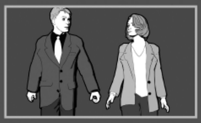
During the approach, Anne can already begin the dialogue before she reaches the man. In the exit shot the man can remain positioned facing the camera, allowing for a nice reaction shot while Anne departs in the background. As you look at the panels above, consider variations using the A, I, L positions.

why stop there?

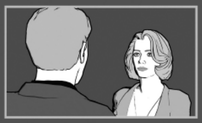
If we can connect two poses, we can just as easily connect an unlimted number of poses in a single scene.



This is the dialogue for the panel to the right, but we're breaking it up. Your characters don't need to stay in one place, so look for natural breaks in the scene. This first block of dialogue will be in a traveling shot.



Here's the second part of the dialogue after the actors stop walking. We can break the dialogue up with a new pose for each section of dialogue. However, a new pose should be chosen only if it serves the emotional and dramatic needs of the scene.



working with actors

Most of the book explains staging in an analytical way, which is the best way to learn in the beginning. However, actors are the life's blood of a motion picture and their process is emotional. Even though your storyboard may be great, if the actor has an alternative approach, it's important to listen. Complex choreography requiring the actor to precisely hit marks is a distraction, and repeated takes are tiring for the actor. A good director learns how to adapt to the actors and also how to help them work through the challenges of complex staging when the storyboard must be followed.

In situations where there is no storyboard, the process of staging means walking through the action explained in the script. As you walk through the scene, think in terms of poses (shots). Then you rehearse. Let the actors do what they think their characters would do. See anything you like? If so, use it.

Sometimes it's useful to show the storyboard to the the actors, but from their point of view, knowing where to hit their marks is one more thing to think about that distracts from their process. One way to help is to remain focused on the actor's performance and allow the cinematographer or assistant director to adjust the staging. You will concentrate on the performance. You need to protect the actor from becoming frustrated with the filmmaking process. If you provide the actors a consistent emotional goal for a scene the technical requirements are far less distracting for them.

25 Parting Shots

The future of storytelling. Where have we been and where are we going. Big questions, but if we look at the arc of technology beginning in the fifteenth century with the development of linear perspective, the general trend has been to replicate reality, or at least our perception of it. This trend has been accelerating for 500 years, but the digitization of all media has accelerated the acceleration. Dramatically. One century of improvements in film stock is equal to about 15 years' development of digital image sensors.

Even more dramatic is the change in the way movies are disseminated. The theatrical movie experience is competing with increasingly impressive home theater installations but even the latest 90-inch flat panels are not cutting edge. Why? Because direct input to the brain via VR glasses will be available within a few years, with lasers projecting directly on the eye's retina, a major advance over glasses placing miniature video displays in front of each eye. This is all in its infancy but this and other neural-based approaches to delivering data to the brain are going to dominate the second half of 21st century media. VR may launch, fail, and launch again within the next decade, but the goal of direct input to the brain by a future technology is going to be the holy grail of media companies, and VR is just the beginning. We are in the age of neuroscience. Give it about 25 years to become a must-have consumer product.

For those of us steeped in traditional film and the almost two-century-old love affair with silver chemistry, change at the current rate means the end to cherished values and processes, but in the end a filmmaker has a story to tell and the tools are secondary. We at least have the choice to make them secondary, even though we live in an age of eye candy and short attention spans, with the emphasis on techno flash. Commercial filmmaking is still the blisteringly competitive business for indie filmmakers that it's been for more than 50 years. The alternative is reaching a small audience on YouTube or some other online distributor we haven't seen yet. This is really all a filmmaker needs, but it may not be a living. While this may sound dour, it’s actually a hugely positive development. Right now, you can take your iPhone and make a short. You can upload your short in a few days and you can begin to build an audience. You don’t need investors or distributors. You don’t have to license your copyright to others. You don’t have to listen to a half-dozen gatekeepers demanding changes to your work. So what are you waiting for …?

GLOSSARY

This partial list of terms includes the basic technical vocabulary used in this book. A more complete collection of film terms can be found in *How to Read a Film*, by James Monaco; *The VES Handbook of Visual Effects: Industry Standard VFX Practices*, by Jeffrey A. Okun and Susan Zwerman; *Focal Encyclopedia of Film and Television Techniques*, by Raymond Spottiswoode; and the current standard comprehensive dictionary of film, *The Complete Film Dictionary, 2nd Edition*, by Ira Konigsberg.

A

AERIAL or **BIRD'S EYE SHOT** A shot taken from a very high angle, most often a wide establishing shot. Drones, with their ability to affordably acquire high-angle video in remote or difficult locations, have increased the use of these shots.

AMERICAN SOCIETY OF CINEMATOGRAPHERS (ASC) A nonprofit craft organization of cinematographers with headquarters in Hollywood, California. This organization publishes both the *American Cinematographer Manual* and *The American Cinematographer*, a monthly magazine.

ANGLE OF VIEW The size of the field covered by a lens measured in degrees. A wide-angle lens has a wide angle of view while a telephoto lens has a narrow angle of view. Because a rectangular aperture masks the film, the angle of view for any given lens is described according to the height and width of the aperture.

ASPECT RATIO The relationship between the height and width of a motion-picture or television frame expressed numerically. Since the advent of digital projection standards there is one dominant projection aspect ratio, 16:9; HDTV has varying resolutions, including 2k, 4k, and 5k, with 8k also being introduced. A wider aspect ratio on the order of CinemaScope is accomplished by reducing the height of the picture.

B

BEAT BOARDS Simple thumbnail sketches of key moments in a story or "story beats." Typically used after a shot list and as preparation for a more detailed storyboard.

BLOCKING THE SCENE The arrangement and choreographed movement of actors and major props (e.g., automobiles, horses) for the camera. Also called staging. Since the camera can also move, blocking the scene may include the movement of the camera.

BOOM 1. Camera boom. A mechanical arm counterweighted to support a camera and attached to a dolly. Operated manually or by remote control, it permits a technician to move the camera over or through spaces that would otherwise be inaccessible. 2. Microphone boom. A telescoping arm that supports a microphone. The soundman positions the microphone just outside the camera frame while recording sound within the scene.

C

CAMERA ANGLE The viewpoint chosen by the director or cinematographer to photograph a subject.

CAMERA ANGLE PROJECTION A method of turning the architectural plan and elevation for a set into a perspective drawing for the purpose of previewing how the finished set will appear to the camera when using a particular lens, camera position, and aspect ratio.

CANTED FRAME Sometimes called Chinese or Dutch angles. The angling of the camera so that the horizontal frame line is not parallel to the horizon. A slightly canted frame dynamically charges the composition, while extreme angling has become a conventional way of conveying disorder and mayhem. The canted frame was used extensively in Carol Reed's *The Third Man*.

CHOKER SHOT Essentially a close-up, most often including the chin to top of hair with a little room at the top and bottom.

CONTINUITY STYLE The photographic and editorial style that creates the illusion of a spatial/temporal continuum so that a sequence of shots appears to present events as they happened. The continuity style is the predominant style of narrative films, sometimes called the Hollywood classical style or in France, “découpage classique.”

COUNTERING Camera movement that is in the opposite direction of a moving subject.

COVER SHOT See *MASTER SHOT*.

CROSS-CUTTING The alternating of shots from two or more scenes to indicate parallel action.

CUTAWAY A single shot inserted into a sequence that momentarily interrupts the general flow of action. The inserted shot may introduce a pertinent detail or a new location related to the action, or a POV shot.

D

DEEP FOCUS A style of cinematography and staging that uses wide-angle lenses and small lens apertures to emphasize depth by keeping objects in the extreme foreground and background in focus simultaneously.

DEPTH OF FIELD The amount of space in front of and behind the focus plane that appears acceptably sharp through a lens.

DETAIL SHOT A tighter, more highly magnified version of the close-up used to show a fragment of a whole subject or a small object in its entirety.

DIGITAL INTERMEDIATE (D. I.) The process of digitally color correcting a finished film/video in postproduction performed in a real-time DI suite, typically with the director present.

DOLLY SHOT A shot made from a moving dolly. Also called a tracking or traveling shot.

DRONE SHOT A shot made from a quad copter or drone.

E

ESTABLISHING SHOT A shot to introduce a new location in a movie, typically a wide shot from a high angle, and the first shot of the new scene. However, while many directors establish this way, directors such as Steven Spielberg may begin a scene in close-up and pull back to a wide shot — an inherently more provocative approach. See *AERIAL SHOT*.

F

FLASH CUT An extremely brief shot, as short as one frame, which is nearly subliminal in effect. Also, a series of short staccato shots that create a rhythmic effect.

FOCUS IN, OUT A transition effect by which an incoming shot comes into focus or an outgoing shot goes out of focus.

FOCUS PULL/FOLLOW FOCUS The refocusing of the lens during a shot to keep a moving subject within the depth of field.

FOLLOW SHOT A tracking shot, pan, or zoom move that follows a moving subject.

FORMS, OPEN AND CLOSED Styles of graphic composition. *OPEN FORMS* tend to emphasize looser, less controlled positioning of elements in the frame as if they were unplanned, extending beyond the boundaries of the frame as though the camera just discovered them. Open-form compositions are characteristic of documentary films, accounting for their reputation as being more realistic. *CLOSED FORMS* tend toward self-contained compositions carefully arranged to include everything of importance within the frame.

FRONTALITY A style of figure placement in composition, popular in Western art, in which the subject of a painting or drawing faces the general direction of the viewer.

I

INSERT, INSERT SHOT Usually a close-up showing an important detail of a scene.

INTERCUT See *CROSS-CUTTING*.

J

JIB ARM A mechanical arm supported on a dolly and counterweighted to hold the camera for an increased range of motion, usually vertical.

JUMP CUT A linkage of shots in a scene in which the appearance of real continuous time has been interrupted by omission. In certain situations, jump cuts are an accepted convention for compressing time. They can also be used as a deliberately disruptive device to make the viewer aware of film technique, as in the work of Godard. Recent trends have seen the use of the staccato jump cut in music videos and commercials for purely rhythmic effect.

L

LOCKED-OFF CAMERA When the camera is on a tripod or other stable support, the mechanism that controls the movement of the camera, such as a fluid or geared head, can be locked in position for a static shot.

LOOSE Refers to the composition of a shot. Loose framing includes a great deal of space around a subject.

M

MARK As in "hit your mark." The mark in this case is the place the actor is supposed to be. Most often the mark is a location in the scene an actor is going to. It could be a few feet away from the actor's position or across a room. The mark is typically identified with a piece of colored adhesive tape placed on the floor, out of camera view but visible to the actor in the scene.

MASTER/MASTER SHOT The viewpoint of a scene in which the relationships between subjects are clear and the entire dramatic action could be understood if no other shots were used (as opposed to the wider establishing shot).

MATCH CUT A transition effect between shots in a scene, or as a transition. 1. Two shots of the same action joined so that continuous motion is preserved. 2. Two or more shots of the same subject joined to preserve continuous placement and motion in each shot to indicate the passage of time. 3. Two shots of different subjects that share graphic elements or motion with precisely registered contours. For example, an image of the moon in a first shot lines up exactly with a circular mirror in a second shot. In Bob Fosse's *All That Jazz*, several dancers in a rehearsal hall are seen from one angle executing the same steps. Match cuts connect the actions as if they were performed by one dancer in an unbroken movement.

MISE-EN-SCÈNE In French, "putting in the scene." Originally, the term described the physical production of a play: the sets, props, and staging of a scene. Over the years, the term has been adapted to the description of filmic space — that is, the manipulation of staging and action within a shot during filming as opposed to the manipulation of space afterwards in the editorial process.

MONTAGE From the French term "to assemble." In European film, montage is a description of the editorial process. In Soviet film, under the influence of the early Soviet directors, particularly Sergei Eisenstein, montage represented the very essence of film art. In the United States, montage has a special meaning, referring to a concentrated narrative device, usually lasting only a minute, in which a portion of the story is expressed without dialogue using a series of dissolves to connect short, expressive, often symbolic shots.

MOVING SHOT A shot in which the camera is moved to follow a moving subject.

O

OFF CAMERA (OC) Same as offscreen.

OFFSCREEN (OS) Direction in a screenplay when a subject or sound is outside of the camera frame.

ON CAMERA Term indicating that a player or object can be seen by the camera.

OTS (Over The Shoulder shot) A composition in which an actor or character is placed on the left or right side of the camera, but past the vertical center of the frame with their back to the camera. This leaves room on the opposite side of the frame for the actor (who is facing the camera). This staging is very common in dialogue scenes. In addition to over-the-shoulder framings, the same idea works over the hip, or over the knee. Essentially, the OTS uses one actor in a scene as a framing device. Typically, the OTS is part of a Shot, Reverse Shot pattern.

P

PERSPECTIVE In the graphic arts and film, the illusion of depth on a two-dimensional surface.

PIXEL A physical point in a raster image or more simply, the smallest controllable element of a digital picture represented on a screen. Pixels are the little square tiles that you see when you zoom into a digital image.

POINT OF VIEW (POV) SHOT A subjective viewpoint, one that is understood to represent an individual's vision.

PRESENCE 1. In audio recording, the ambient sound characteristic of a room or location. 2. The term used by André Bazin to identify the illusion of real third-dimensional space that the viewer experiences when watching a film. Bazin regarded this as a further development of Renaissance linear perspective.

PREVISUALIZATION/PREVIS/PREVIZ The prototyping of a film sequence using digital technology.

PRINCIPAL PHOTOGRAPHY The main photography of a film and the period of time during which it takes place.

PULLBACK SHOT A dolly shot or zoom effect that begins in close-up on an object and slowly widens to include more of the area surrounding the object.

R

REACTION SHOT In a dialogue scene the shot of a player listening while another player's voice continues on the sound track. Most reaction shots are close-ups.

RETRACKING The backward movement of the camera on a dolly (on or off track) along a path that it has already covered in the same shot or in a previous shot in the same scene.

REVERSE ANGLE A shot that is turned approximately 180 degrees in relation to the preceding shot.

S

SCRATCH TRACK A temporary voice recording for animation or previsualization in which inexpensive voice talent or members of the creative team are substituted for bankable voice talent (movie stars) during preproduction.

SEQUENCE SHOT A traveling camera shot in which choreographed action and camera movement replace the need for individual shots to describe complex action.

SETUP The choice of camera angle, shot size, and staging. It is frequently described by the number of players in a shot: A two-shot, over-the-shoulder shot, and close-up are all typical setups.

SHALLOW FOCUS A shallow depth of field. Shallow focus is sometimes used to isolate a subject in focus from the indistinct background and foreground.

SHOT, REVERSE SHOT or **SHOT, COUNTER SHOT** An editing and compositional pattern typical of dialogue sequences in which the camera frames a subject (the shot) and cuts to a matching (reverse) shot from a new angle approximately 180 degrees from the first. This is a staple of dialogue sequences or any situation where there are two or more subjects interacting. The pair of shots is alternated with dialogue and each shot is a mirror image of the previous shot, but alternating between the actors. However, a Shot, Reverse Shot pattern is not restricted to dialogue and can also work with any subjects.

SIGHT LINE An imaginary line that is drawn between a subject and the object he or she is looking at. When individual CUs of two subjects in conversation are joined together in a sequence their sight lines must match in order that they appear to be looking at each other.

SINGLE A shot with only one subject in the frame.

STATIC CAMERA Any shot in which the camera does not move.

SUBJECTIVE CAMERA A camera technique that presents the viewpoint of a character in the scene. See *POINT OF VIEW (POV) SHOT*.

SWISH PAN A rapid panning movement that blurs the frame. It is often used as a transition. Also called a *FLASH PAN*.

T

TAKE One version of a shot. The director has the cast and crew repeat the action of the shot in successive takes until he or she is satisfied it is correct.

TIGHT Describes the size of a shot relative to its subject. A tight frame encloses a subject with very little space surrounding it.

TRACKING SHOT A shot taken from a camera mounted on a dolly or some other moving vehicle.

TRAVELING SHOT Any shot in which the camera moves through space. A crane shot and a tracking shot are both traveling shots. A pan shot, however, is not a traveling shot since the camera remains at one location pivoting a stationary point.

TWO-SHOT A shot that frames two people.

V

VOICE-OVER (VO) The voice of an unseen narrator. Voice-over may also be used to indicate the thoughts of a character in a scene when the character is not speaking.

W

WIPE A transition between shots.

WRAP The official end of a day's shooting.

Z

ZIP PAN See *SWISH PAN*.

ZOOM The movement of a zoom lens or the lens itself.

Recommended Reading

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ONLINE RESOURCES

Many principles of filmmaking and design are the same in both the analog and digital realms. This is not true of computer software, where the majority of film design and production take place. This includes shooting on location if you are using a digital camera that is a species of computer too. Things change yearly/monthly, so http://shotbyshotbook.com will provide more up-to-date information on digital resources available online. There's a lot of it, but the quality varies.

Here are some of the best and hopefully stable sources of information and learning for the nitty-gritty of digital production and software.

Lynda.com
In-depth training in popular software such as Adobe: After Effects, Photoshop, Premiere, Cinema 4D, Maya, and dozens of other media-related software applications.

Redgiant.com
This is a visual effects software site with great tutorials. They have positioned themselves to help indie filmmakers. In addition to VFX products such as Trapcode, they have many tools for color correction of indie movies. The folks that run the company are filmmakers.

Pluralsight.com (formerly Digital Tutors)
Visual effects and game production software training at a high level for software such as Maya, Cinema 4D, Houdini, ZBrush, Blender, Photoshop, and many more.

Fxphd.com
Technical training in several key VFX software applications as well as art/tech theory for digital production.

Cinemetrics.lv
A fascinating scientific/statistical approach to film study by measuring the length of shots, the number of shots, and other quantitative measurements over the history of film. An academic site by film scholar Barry Salt.

FILM DESIGN FILM DESIGN FILM DESIGN FILM DESIG

SHOT BY SHOT

SHOT BY SHOT NOW HAS A WEBSITE WITH RESOURCES FOR DIRECTORS, WRITERS, PRODUCERS, AND CINEMATOGRAPHERS.

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About the Author

Steven D. Katz is an award-winning writer, director, and producer. His eclectic work includes light shows for the Grateful Dead, shorts for *Saturday Night Live*, the first major 3D animated movie in China, the first full digital previsualization for a motion picture (*Clear and Present Danger*), months spent at the Neverland Ranch as Michael Jackson’s film teacher, and a couple of decades writing about film for cinema and art publications. He lives by the same advice he teaches: Keep making art! For more information, visit shotbyshotbook.com.

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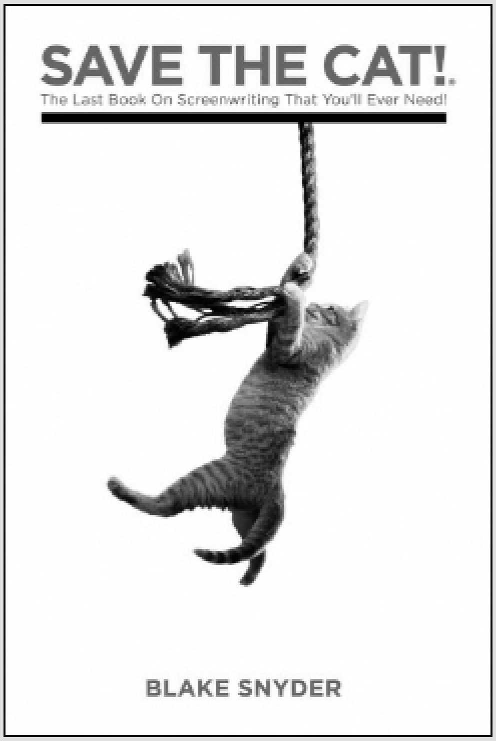
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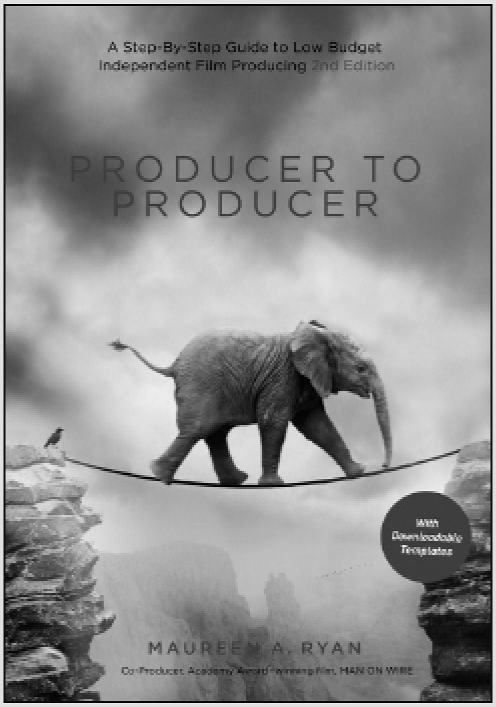
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—Ben Odell, producer, *Padre Nuestro*, partner, Panamax Films

MAUREEN RYAN has been a film producer for over 20 years with experience in narrative film, documentary, short film, commercials, music videos, and industrials. Other films she produced have won a BAFTA Award, a Peabody Award, and an Emmy nomination. She has taught film producing at Columbia university's School of the Arts Graduate Film Program since 1999 and also teaches producing at nyu's Tisch School of the Arts.

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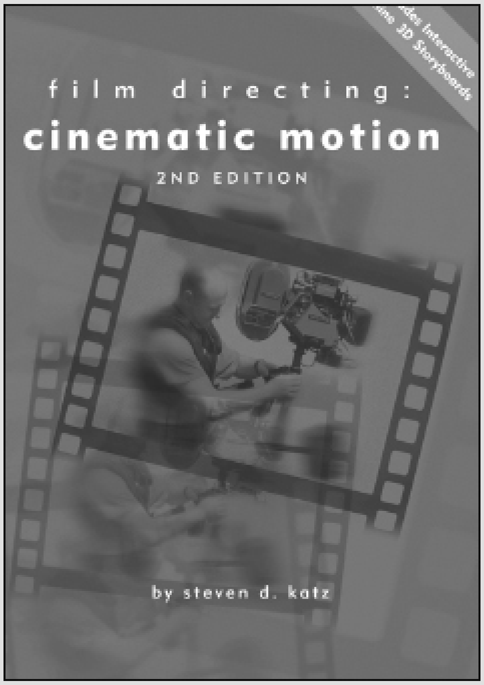

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VISUAL STORYTELLING
HOW TO SPEAK TO YOUR AUDIENCE WITHOUT SAYING A WORD MORGAN SANDLER

If you have ever wondered how professional films create such dynamic images, then this book is for you! *Visual Storytelling* will help you craft masterful images without a Hollywood budget. The book covers everything from basic story structure to composition, lighting and camera work. *Visual Storytelling* is a standalone course in directing and cinematography that gives the readers all the tools they need to craft a visually compelling film.

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- Covers numerous areas of filmmaking, creating well informed and skilled filmmakers.
- Written in a very conversational and approachable style making it easy for new filmmakers to digest.
- Sandler is a professional filmmaker as well as a university film professor.
- The book can be used as a textbook in schools to accompany beginner and intermediate film courses or as a standalone text.

"Sandler, a cinematographer, covers every visual tool in detail, from the direction and intensity of lighting, to the lenses and focus used. A brilliant read for those aspiring to be in his position."

—Kathryn Butt, Raindance

MORGAN SANDLER is a professor of Digital Film Production at the University of La Verne, in Southern California. Previously, he helped design the Digital Cinematography program at California State University, Los Angeles, where he also served as an adjunct professor. He also previously served as the Course Director of Cinematography at The Los Angeles Film School, where he taught for 10 years helping to shape many courses and design a large portion of the curriculum.

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CINEMATIC STORYTELLING
THE 100 MOST POWERFUL FILM CONVENTIONS EVERY FILMMAKER MUST KNOW

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This book is intended to help writers and directors more fully exploit the medium's inherent storytelling devices. It contains 100 non-dialog techniques that have been used by the industry's top writers and directors. From *Metropolis* and *Citizen Kane* to *Dead Man* and *Kill*

Bill, the book illustrates — through 500 frame grabs and 75 script excerpts — how the inherent storytelling devices specific to film were exploited.

You will learn:

- How non-dialog film techniques can advance story.
- How master screenwriters exploit cinematic conventions to create powerful scenarios.

"Cinematic Storytelling *scores a direct hit in terms of concise information and perfectly chosen visuals, and it also searches out… and finds… an emotional core that many books of this nature either miss or are afraid of."*

—Kirsten Sheridan, Director, *Disco Pigs;* Co-writer, *In America*

"Here is a uniquely fresh, accessible, and truly original contribution to the field. Jennifer van Sijll takes her readers in a wholly new direction, integrating aspects of screenwriting with all the film crafts in a way I've never before seen. It is essential reading not only for screenwriters but also for filmmakers of every stripe."

—Prof. Richard Walter, UCLA Screenwriting Chairman

JENNIFER VAN SIJLL has taught film production, film history, and screenwriting. She is currently on the faculty at San Francisco State's Department of Cinema.

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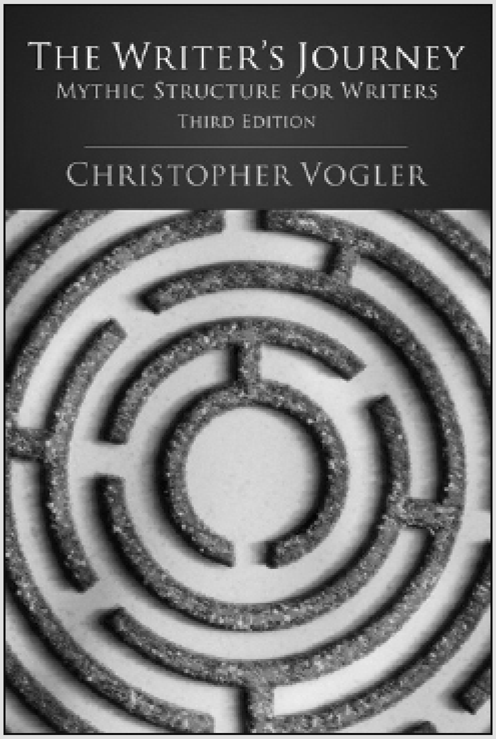
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—Bruce Joel Rubin, screenwriter, *Stuart Little 2, Deep Impact, Ghost, Jacob's Ladder*

CHRISTOPHER VOGLER is a veteran story consultant for major Hollywood film companies and a respected teacher of filmmakers and writers around the globe. He has influenced the stories of movies from *The Lion King* to *Fight Club* to *The Thin Red Line* and most recently wrote the first installment of *Ravenskull*, a Japanese-style manga or graphic novel. He is the executive producer of the feature film *P. S. Your Cat is Dead* and writer of the animated feature *Jester Till*.

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